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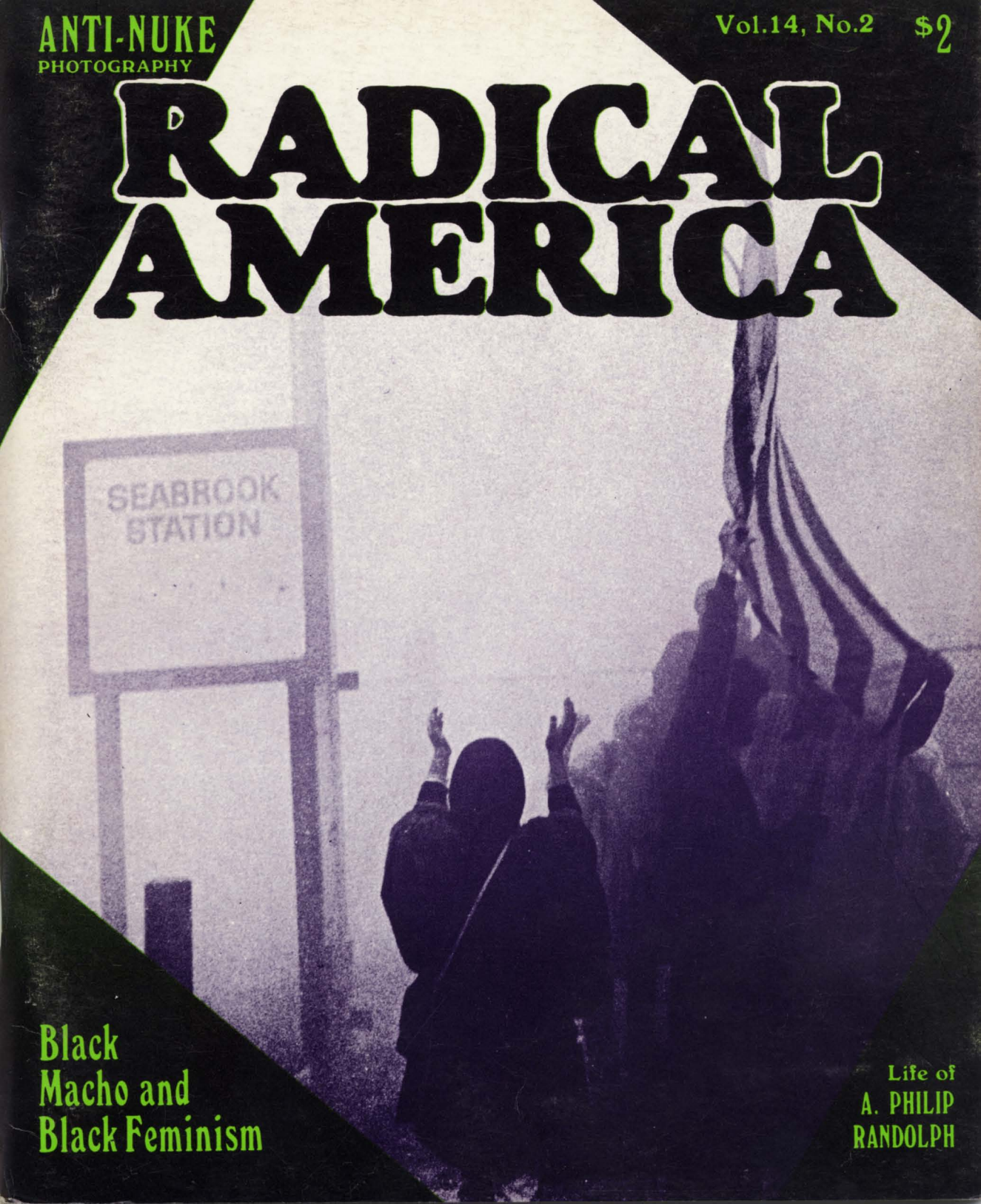
ANTI-NUKE PHOTOGRAPHY

RADICAL AMERICA



Black Macho and Black Feminism

Life of A. PHILIP RANDOLPH

Front and back cover photos by Ellen Shub.

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INTRODUCTION

For nearly half a century, A. Philip Randolph was a leading figure in the American labor movement. A black man, Randolph grew up in Florida and moved to Harlem in 1911, where he soon became a leading figure in the Socialist Party. His magazine *The Messenger* was one of the most provocative and radical within the socialist movement; and during the First World War his opposition to the war and advocacy of black draft resistance led Woodrow Wilson to call Randolph "the most dangerous Negro in America."

In spite of this promising beginning, the meaning of Randolph's work and the nature of his radicalism are in dispute. As Marable shows, Randolph's later career is a checkerboard of radical initiatives and strategic retreats, imposing the acceptance of limited gains and demobilizing mass movements. He organized a nationwide strike of sleeping car porters, only to call it off at the last minute. He joined with Communists and progressives to form the National Negro Congress in 1936, only to abandon it over the issue of "communist control" in 1940. He organized the March on Washington Movement in 1941, demanding an end to discrimination against black workers, only to call it off when Roosevelt promised to create a Fair Employment Practices Committee. And he initiated a movement to encourage black draft resistance in 1948, only to abandon it too when Truman issued an order banning segregation in the Armed Forces.

In illuminating these contradictions, Marable's essay on Randolph's career provides a valuable introduction to the often-conflicting claims of race and class for black workers in the United States. Throughout his life, Randolph considered himself a Marxist, and

conceived of the struggle for socialism as the uniting of black and white workers in trade unions. He reserved his harshest criticisms for blacks who wished to isolate themselves in all-black organizations, and who refused to raise "economic" issues in their political work. While he himself became the leader of the all-black Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, he apparently felt little kinship with the developing black nationalism spurred by the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, but instead guided his union into the conservative and racist AF of L.

Throughout his career, Randolph worked for the advancement of black workers through the solidarity of labor. Yet Marable concludes that Randolph's great weakness lay in his refusal to recognize the political and radical content buried in the awakening of black nationalism. In a sense, Randolph's worldview was a black version of "black and white unite and fight," insisting that economic interests were the cement to unite the working class. Thus he found his home in the ideological center of the American labor movement, a black labor leader in a world of white practitioners of "business unionism," rejecting the "extremes" offered by the Communist Party or Marcus Garvey.

Randolph's approach led him, at the end of his career, to the comic-strip anti-communism of the Social Democrats U.S.A. This is a group whose positions have often been on the *right* wing of the AFL-CIO, not only on foreign-policy issues but on affirmative action as well.

At a time when racial progress has stalled in many areas, we will see an increasing number of commentators who say that race is not "the real issue." In its left-wing variant this approach will say that class *is* "the real issue," and that the special problems of blacks and other minorities will be worked out in the course of a united class struggle. This is tempting, because there will be plenty of obvious bread-and-butter problems in the 1980s which all working class people will have in common. But Marable's account of A. Philip Randolph's life suggests that there can be no real unity unless the special situation of racial minorities is attacked head-on.

The hostility to black nationalism exhibited by an orthodox trade-unionist like Randolph was itself a serious obstacle to the struggle for racial equality. This kind of knee-jerk rejection of nationalism obscured the necessity for autonomous movements and prevented the exploration of black cultures and worldviews and their challenges to white cultural norms.

Another article in this issue, on black feminism, illustrates some of the dangers in the uncritical use of black nationalism. The strength and politicization of US black identity in the 1950s and 1960s placed a premium on loyalty to black leadership and solidarity which in turn tended to suppress conflicts among black Americans. The rapid development of a black feminist movement in the 1970s is a response to and protest against the suppression of black women's particular interests within the black liberation movement.

We address black feminism in this issue through a review of Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman.* This book very particularly pits black women against black men. In fact the black feminist movement is also autonomous of, and critical of, white feminism and all white radicals for their racism.

When Michele Wallace's book first appeared in 1979, it generated a great deal of interest and controversy. The book's provocative title, and the advertising exploitation of the question of sexual relations in the black community sharply contrasted with the publishing corporations' long refusal to recognize black feminism except through, primarily, a few great black women

writers of fiction. The controversy developed in particular, as Linda Powell explains, when criticism of the book became an excuse for anti-feminist rantings in general and attacks on black feminists in particular. We were particularly alarmed at such anti-feminist reviews in Left publications.

As Powell points out, despite its ahistorical conceptualizations and misguided conclusions, the book can be helpful by making more public the reality of black feminism. This is a critical time for the development of a fuller political concept of feminism, and a critique of earlier feminisms, to which black feminists will probably contribute in very important ways. Of course, not all black feminists are alike. Although Wallace glides over differences within the black women's movement, they are substantial, just as class and cultural differences among US blacks are large and growing. Nevertheless, Powell argues, there is a central, preliminary message being delivered by black feminists, about the importance of recognizing the existence of black male privilege, constrained though it is by enormous class and race oppression.

Maurice Isserman's article, "The 1956 Generation," is a brief but innovative treatment of the Communist Party U.S.A. Isserman argues that left activists and historians have too often seen the CP as a "single-celled organism" rather than as a complex organization that had to adjust to the needs of its own cadre in order to survive and grow.

This insight alone is enough to make Isserman's article a useful one. In recent years we have had new Leninist parties which have been seemingly dedicated to re-creating the American CP at a particular point in its past, maintaining that mistakes (either in Moscow or in New York) caused the party to turn away from its true course. This is a profoundly unhistorical approach, substituting sheer idealism ("bad ideas") for an historical explanation and analysis of why the CP evolved in a particular way. There is room (perhaps more than Isserman himself allows) for critical judgments about CP policies in the past, but these judgments have to be based on a real historical understanding. They *cannot* start from an assumption that the party members were a group of automatons who could be taken in any direction the top level party leadership wanted to take them.

Isserman applies his analysis particularly to the CP's popular-front policies of the late 1930s and thereafter. He argues that the popular front was particularly congenial to a layer of party cadre (many of them the children of the immigrants) for whom the party served as a form of assimilation into American life. For many of the CP's Jewish cadre, he writes, the party "served as a bridge between the Russian origins and socialist beliefs of their parents and the 'progressive' borderlands of New Deal America." The popular front, rather than a simple manipulation by Moscow or the quirk of CP leader Earl Browder, reflected the experiences and aspirations of a large body of the party's own activists. This insight tells a lot about the popular front and a lot about the fervency of CP support for World War II once the U.S. and Soviet Union were allies.

Isserman's term "1956 generation" is based on the fact that so many of the people he writes about left the party in the late 1950s, after the Hungarian revolution and USSR's admission of Stalin's crimes. These were people who had spent two decades or more in the party. It should be clear that the article is concerned with these long-term cadre rather than with the party's rank-and-file. At the base, the party was often a revolving door, with a tremendous number coming in for a while and then leaving. Obviously Isserman's analysis cannot be auto-

matically transferred to any segment of these people. In particular, working class people are underrepresented in the sample of party members whom Isserman describes. A full historical and political analysis of the CP has to take account of its transient as well as its long-term members. In making this fuller analysis, however, the basic approach suggested by Isserman's article is bound to be extremely helpful.

Finally, we are very pleased to be able to print Ellen Shub's photo essay on the Anti-nuke Struggle: 1979. Ellen is a Boston-based, free lance photographer, whose photos have appeared in *Seven Days, Science for the People, Community Press Features, The Guardian,* and *Radical America.* She has been documenting people's movement struggles since 1973, particularly those involving feminism, health care, prisons, and environmental issues. She also produced the 1978 Liberation Movement photocalendar.

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A. PHILIP RANDOLPH AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF BLACK AMERICAN SOCIALISM

Manning Marable

Asa Philip Randolph was the most influential black trade unionist in American history. He may also have been, next to W. E. B. DuBois, the most important Afro-American socialist of the twentieth century. His accomplishments in black union organizing, militant journalism, and political protest were unequaled for decades. His controversial newspaper, *The Messenger*, published from 1917 to 1928, was the first socialist journal to attract a widespread audience among black working- and middle-class people. In 1941 he led the Negro March on Washington Movement to protest racial discrimination in federal hiring policies, establishing a precedent which was to be revived over two decades later at the high point of the civil rights movement. Early in his career, Randolph earned the hatred and fear of the capitalist elite and federal government officials. President Woodrow Wilson referred to the black socialist leader as "the most dangerous Negro in America."

Later in his life, Randolph's contributions to the Afro-American freedom struggle were severely criticised. In the late 1960s, young black industrial workers condemned Randolph and other black trade union leaders for not representing their problems and vital interests. To the black activists in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers he came to represent a modern Booker T. Washington, without the Tuskegee educator's skill at political compromise and power. In 1968 when blacks demanded greater decision-making authority in New York's public school system and charged the United Federation of Teachers with racism, Randolph heartily defended the UFT and its leader, Albert Shanker. In 1976 he lent his support to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a conservative, racist Democrat, when Moynihan was

Opposite: Randolph (in center) leading 1948 demonstration at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia,[7] *demanding that segregation be outlawed in the military.*

running for the U.S. Senate from New York. By then, Randolph's image as a radical socialist and militant trade unionist had been utterly erased. Upon his death in May, 1979, Vice President Walter Mondale glorified the black leader, declaring that "America can speak out for human rights around the world, without hypocrisy, because of the faith A. Philip Randolph ... showed in our country."

Thus we approach the great legacy of Randolph with some sadness and uncertainty. So many questions are left unanswered by the path of his brilliant and yet contradictory career. Some Marxists suggest that the "decisive break" in Randolph's career occurred in 1919, when he parted company with other black socialists like Grace Campbell, Cyril V. Briggs, and Frank Crosswaith, who joined the fledgling Communist party. "The issue was clear cut," argued Irwin Silber of the *Guardian*, "not support for socialism in general or in the abstract, but support for and defense of the Bolshevik revolution." Randolph's decision to choose "the path of social democracy" was "the decisive turning point in a political life devoted to preventing revolutionary forces from winning leadership of the Black liberation struggle."[1] As we shall observe, this split was not as decisive as Silber or others suggest. Randolph admired and supported the Russian Revolution for many years. Throughout his early career, especially in the periods 1919-22 and 1935-40, he welcomed the support of Marxist-Leninists, although differing with them politically. In general, there is much greater continuity of political ideology and practice from the younger to the older Randolph than is usually thought.

This essay does not attempt to present a comprehensive view of Randolph's political life. (Numerous books and articles document his long and productive career, usually in a very positive light.[2]) Instead, this essay will examine Randolph's early career as a militant journalist, Socialist party candidate, and trade unionist, from his arrival in New York in 1911 until the late 1920s. Many of Randolph's major accomplishments, such as founding the National Negro Congress during the Great Depression, the March on Washington Movement of 1941, and the civil disobedience campaign against military conscription in 1948, are discussed here only briefly, if at all. This is because, first, the fundamental outlines of Randolph's socialism and political activism were firmly established during an earlier period. The roots of his thought were in the chaotic experiences of World War I and its aftermath. Second, the foundations for subsequent black working-class activism and modern black nationalism were established in the twenties. The competing political forces in Harlem of that period — Garveyism, left black nationalism, militant integrationism, Marxism-Leninism — are themes which recur within the black movement today. The political decisions Randolph made during the 1920s, for better or worse, set much of the pattern for socialism and trade-union work within the black community. The attempt here is to criticize Randolph's emergent theory of social transformation during his formative decade of political activism and to develop an understanding of the consequences of his sometimes eclectic political practice. The legacy of Randolph's politics and trade unionism which is carried on by his protegé Bayard Rustin will also be considered in this light.

A BLACK PROLETARIAT

The historical period of World War I and the immediate postwar years brought substantial changes to black Americans in general and to blacks in industrial labor in particular. For the first time in history, a substantial number of Southern, rural blacks were moving to the industrial urban North. Against the paternalis-

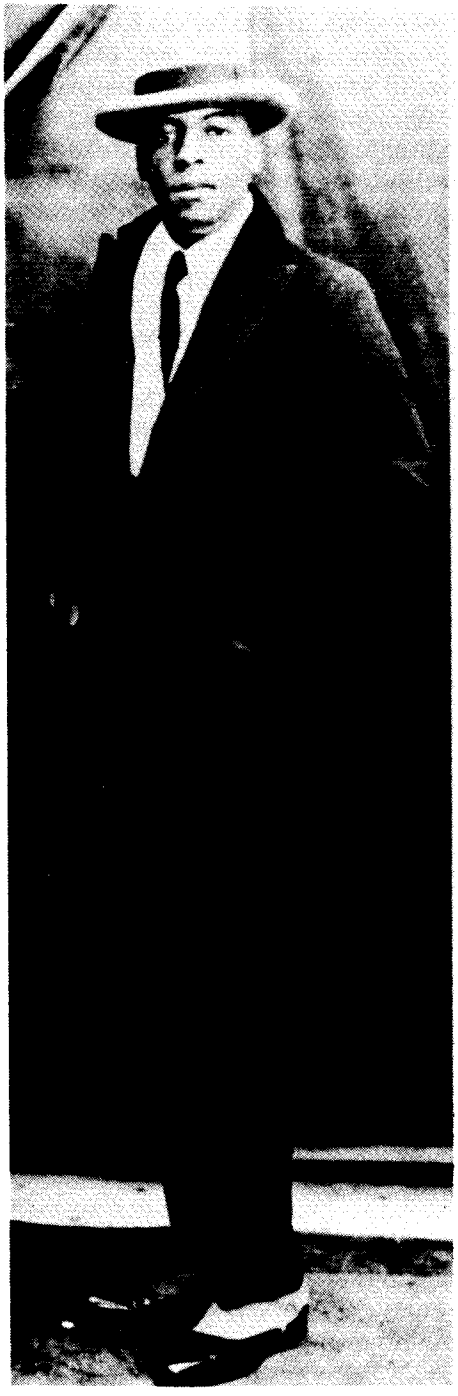
tic advice of Booker T. Washington, almost half a million black men, women and children left the South before and during World War I. Simultaneously, writes Philip Foner, "the first black industrial working class in the United States came into existence." The number of blacks employed in industry between 1910 to 1920 rose from 551,825 to 901,131. By 1920 about one third of all Afro-American workers were employed in industry. However, only about 15 percent of those workers held skilled or semiskilled jobs. The great majority of black workers earned a living in the very lowest paying and most physically difficult jobs.[3]

As the political economy of black America took a decisive shift toward the industrial North, competing political interests began organizing, leading, and interacting with the new black labor force. Broadly conceived, four potential political forces presented alternative agendas to black industrial workers during this period. They were: (1) the old Booker T. Washington-capitalist alliance, which included conservative black ministers, businessmen, and journalists who preached cooperation with the capitalist class; (2) the American Federation of Labor, which in theory called for organizing black workers, but in practice upheld a strict Jim Crow bar; (3) the Marxist trade unionists in the Workers party, later the Communist party and many members of the Socialist party, which advocated black-white labor unity; (4) independent all-black labor organizations, including black nationalist groups influenced by Marcus Garvey, which operated on the outside of the "House of Labor."

The success of Booker T. Washington in attracting white capital to his many enterprises, from the National Negro Business League to Tuskegee Institute, was dangerous for the new black working class in the North. Washington's northern constituency, the aggressive but fragile black entrepreneurial elite, firmly supported a capitalist-Negro alliance against white labor. Washington had argued that blacks should appeal to white employers to hire black workers, since they were "not inclined to trade unionism" and not in favor of strikes. (Tuskegee scientist and inventor George Washington Carver was a friend of auto industrialist Henry Ford.) Thus, a major black newspaper such as the Chicago *Defender* supported Washington's strategy of alliance with the capitalist class. Many prominent black ministers, Republican politicians, and businessmen counseled black workers to reject unionism. Despite this influence, the overwhelming majority of new immigrants from the rural South saw this strategy for what it was, a "dead end" Jim Crow policy which only perpetuated low economic status for the black working class.

On paper, the American Federation of Labor sought to recruit the budding black proletariat to its cause; in actual practice it was scarcely less reactionary than the Ku Klux Klan. Between 1919 to 1927 the number of black locals in the AFL dropped from 161 to 21. Many unions had a long established Jim Crow policy. Sometimes blacks were admitted to separate lodges, and then forced under the authority of a white local. The new president of the AFL, the United Mine Workers' former secretary-treasurer William Green, was not a friend of black workers. Green had tolerated Ku Klux Klan influence within the UMW, and had never taken a strong stand against racial segregation. Green's concern for black labor was only stimulated in the 1920s when it appeared that many Afro-American workers were moving toward Marxism and/or independent trade union activism.[4]

The only white groups which defended black workers' rights during this period were on the Left. Growing out of the militant tradition of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), thousands of socialist organizers of both races



campaigned for worker unity against the issue of white racism. When the "Wobblies" split over the question of the Soviet revolution, many, such as William Z. Foster, joined the Communist party. In 1920 Foster brought together a biracial coalition of Marxists and reformist trade union activists to create the Trade Union Educational League. The TUEL advocated the building of a workers' and farmers' political party, greater racial egalitarianism inside the AFL, and the creation of militant unions for non-craft workers. In 1925 the CP was also active in the formation of the American Negro Labor Congress, an all-black labor group which advocated the building of "interracial labor committees" to promote the introduction of black workers into previously segregated crafts. As the Communists grew more influential in organizing black workers, the fears of AFL leaders mounted.[5]

Related to these developments in the labor Left was the rapid growth of independent black workers' organizations. As thousands of black laborers came to the North, the base for all-black, militant activism in labor increased dramatically. In 1915 a national organization of black railroad workers was created, the Railway Men's Benevolent Association. Within five years it had 15,000 members. In 1917 the Colored Employees of America was founded, one of the first of many groups which attempted to organize all black laborers. Two years later the National Brotherhood Workers of America was established, a coalition of black workers from almost every occupation, including blacksmiths, electricians, dock workers, porters, riveters, and waiters. Until its demise in 1921, it represented a potential alternative to the racist policies of the AFL. To the left of these organizations, black radicals and Marxists urged the development of independent socialist strategies for black labor.[6] Randolph's entire life must be viewed against this initial

 Above: A. Philip Randolph in New York, 1911 or 1912.

period of his activism, a time of tremendous growth and opportunities for black labor in the industrial North.

RANDOLPH'S SOCIALISM

Randolph's personal background conformed in most respects to that of other first-generation black immigrants from the South. Born in Crescent City, Florida, in 1889, he grew up in Jacksonville during the nadir of black-white relations. Inspired as a teenager by DuBois' *Souls of Black Folk*, young Asa decided to leave the South and settle in New York City. Arriving in Harlem in the spring of 1911, Randolph first tried to become an actor. Failing at this, he drifted from one job to another. From 1912-1917 he attended courses at the City College of New York. A leftist philosophy professor, J. Salwyn Shapiro, acquainted Randolph with Marx's writings and other socialist literature. His discovery of socialism was so "exciting," he later reflected, that he studied "Marx as children read *Alice in Wonderland.*"[7] He formed a group of radical "free thinkers" called the Independent Political Council, and began to follow the IWW closely. He began to identify himself with Harlem's premier black socialist and "leading street-corner orator," Hubert Harrison. He joined the Socialist party in the end of 1916, and began to lecture on black history and political economy at the Socialist party's Rand School. By the beginning of World War I, Randolph and his new black friend, Chandler Owen, a fellow socialist, had become "the most notorious street-corner radicals in Harlem, exceeding even Harrison in the boldness of their assault upon political and racial conditions in the country."[8]

Randolph and Owen became involved in a series of efforts to organize black workers in their community. After several weeks' work they won the support of 600 black elevator operators for starting the United Brotherhood of Elevator and Switchboard Operators. The new union's demands included a minimum wage of $13 a week, and an eight-hour day. Receiving a federal charter from the AFL, the short-lived organization tried, and failed, to organize a strike to force recognition. Randolph and Owen were also active in the Headwaiters and Sidewaiters Society as editors of the union's journal, the *Hotel Messenger*. After a dispute with the Society's president, William White, the young Socialists were fired. Within two months, they organized their own montly magazine, the *Messenger*, with the critical financial support provided by Randolph's wife, Lucille, who earned a living as a popular and successful Harlem hair-dresser. Over the next months, the new publication acquired the enthusiastic support of older radicals like Harrison and younger militants like Jamaican socialist W. A. Domingo.[9] Between 1917 and 1918 the journal received the support of a wide variety of Harlem radicals and liberal black intellectuals of various shades: William Pickens, a field secretary of the NAACP; Robert W. Bagnall, NAACP director of branches; Wallace Thurman, Harlem Renaissance author; and essayist George S. Schuyler, a socialist who evolved into a right-wing, Goldwater Republican.

The theoretical basis for Randolph's socialism in his early years, between 1914 to 1920, was an uneven combination of traditional religious reformism, economic determinism, fervent internationalism, and Karl Marx. His father, the Reverend James Randolph, was a pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Upon his move to Harlem, the first organization he joined was the Epworth League, a social club whose principle activity was Bible study and prayer. Later friends recalled that Randolph was the outstanding participant in all Epworth forums. Throughout Randolph's youth his father regarded him "as a

fine prospect for the AME ministry."[10] Randolph rejected the orthodoxy of the cloth, but not the meaning of black spirituality in his politics. The language of the Old Testament would inform many of his speeches, as he deliberately used religious principles of brotherhood and humanism in organizing black workers. Even at the high point of their radicalism, Randolph and Owen spoke at black churches and worked closely with progressive clergy. "There are some Negro ministers," the *Messenger* declared in March, 1920, "who have vision, intelligence and courage. There [are] some upon whose souls the Republican Party has no mortgage."[11] Randolph continued to believe that the black church was "the most powerful and cohesive institution in Negro life." Like his friend Norman Thomas, Randolph's socialism was never rooted in an atheistic outlook.[12]

Like many other socialists of the day, especially those influenced by the intellectual debates between Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky of German Social Democracy, Randolph believed that socialism was a series of economic reforms taking place between management and labor. Through the vehicle of the trade union, the working class seized an increasingly greater share of the decision-making power within the means of production. The expression of working class politics was, of course, the Socialist party. The revolution against capital would be a revolt of the majority against the selfish interests of a tiny, isolated elite. Randolph's definition of socialism limited all of his subsequent work. If the Socialist party was, as Randolph believed, the highest expression of working-class consciousness, and if blacks were profoundly working class, then no other political formation could address blacks' interests as well as the party. Race and ethnicity played no role in the "scientific evolution" of class contradictions; class was an economic category without cultural or social forms. Randolph increasingly viewed any form of black nationalism as a major obstacle between white and black workers in the struggle toward socialist democracy.

The outbreak of World War I deepened Randolph's commitment to militant pacifism and "revolutionary socialism." Like Debs, Randolph and Owen opposed World War I on the principle that "wars of contending national groups of capitalists are not the concern of the workers." The *Messenger*'s first issue denounced the "capitalist origins" of the conflict in a fiery essay, "Who Shall Pay for the War?" The editors told black men that they should not serve when drafted, and charged that the Wilson administration's claim that it was "making the world safe for democracy [was] a sham, a mockery, a rape on decency and a travesty on common justice."[13] In 1918 Randolph and Owen participated in a Socialist party antiwar speaking tour. On August 4, 1918, the two were arrested by federal agents after a mass rally in Cleveland and charged with violating the Espionage Act. Freed with a warning, the young men continued their lecture tour, visiting Chicago, Milwaukee, Washington, D.C., and Boston, where black radical Monroe Trotter joined their mass antiwar rally. In mid-August, Postmaster General Albert Burleson denied second-class mailing privileges to the *Messenger*. Owen was drafted and sent to a Jim Crow army base in the South. Only the armistice kept Randolph out of the draft.[14]

The Bolshevik Revolution inspired Harlem's radicals, seeming to vindicate their faith in revolutionary socialism. "Lenin and Trotsky ... are sagacious, statesmanlike and courageous leaders," the *Messenger* proclaimed in January, 1918. "They are calling upon the people of every country to follow the lead of Russia; to throw off their exploiting rulers, to administer public utilities for the public wel-

fare, to disgorge the exploiters and the profiteers."[15] For several yeras, Randolph argued that the Communist revolution meant the "triumph of democracy in Russia." He praised the Soviet Army's defeat of the White Russians in 1920, stating that the capitalist opponents of socialism "had not reckoned with the indomitable courage and the cold resolution born of the unconquerable love for liberty."[16] Randolph boldly predicted that Bela Kun's Hungarian Communists would eventually defeat the Social Democrats and send the aristocracy "to that oblivion and obscurity from which they ought never to emerge;"[17] he also believed that British capitalism was on the brink of "an impending financial revolution."[18] Domestically, Randolph participated eagerly in the Socialist party's activities. In 1917, the *Messenger* campaigned for Morris Hillquit, Socialist party candidate for mayor. In 1920 Randolph ran as the party's candidate for state comptroller and polled 202,361 votes, only 1,000 less than Socialist presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs in the state! In 1921 he ran another unsuccessful campaign for secretary of state. Despite these failures, Randolph's belief in a democratic socialist revolution remained uncompromised.[19]

CONFLICT WITH DUBOIS

Randolph's strong antiwar position led to a decisive break with DuBois — the major black leader of the NAACP and Randolph's intellectual mentor — in 1918, when the editor of the *Crisis* urged black Americans to support the war effort.[20] Up to this point, the *Messenger* had praised DuBois as a race leader and opponent of "disfranchisement," condemning only his attitude on labor. "One has not seen where the doctor ever recognized the necessity of the Negro as a scab," Owen wrote, "allaying thereby the ill feeling against him by working white man."[21] Now DuBois' advocacy of the war crystallized Randolph's and Owen's opposition to his entire political line — from the "Talented Tenth" theory* to his views on segregtion. By July, 1918, Randolph condemned almost every major essay or book that DuBois had ever written. DuBois was a "political opportunist," simply representing "a good transition from Booker Washington's compromise methods to the era of the new Negro."[22]

Never one to avoid a fight, DuBois defended his anti-Socialist party, anti-trade unionist, anti-Bolshevik and prowar positions head on. As early as January, 1912, when he was a member of the Socialist party, DuBois complained about racism within the organization. He left the party to endorse the election of Woodrow Wilson later that year.[23] His opposition to trade unionism was well established.[24] DuBois' position on the war evolved from examination of the colonial and racist origins of the conflict. The destruction of the German empire, DuBois reasoned, might have resulted in the possibility of greater African self-determination.[25] Meanwhile, black Americans would be rewarded for their loyalty to America's war effort against Germany.[26]

About Russian socialism DuBois was profoundly skeptical. After the "February Revolution" in early 1917, DuBois suggested to his *Crisis* readers that the event "makes us wonder whether the German menace is to be followed by a Russian menace or not."[27] Although he criticized Alexander Kerensky's "blood and iron methods" in governing Russia, he said nothing about the Bolsheviks' rise to power.[28] When radical Harlem Renaissance writer Claude McKay questioned why DuBois "seemed to neglect or sneer at the Russian Rev-

*The idea, used in *The Souls of Black Folk*, of a black intellectual leadership which would act as a vanguard for the black masses.

olution," he replied curtly that he had "heard things which (were) frighten(ing)" about the upheaval. I am "not prepared to dogmatize with Marx or Lenin."[29]

For the new Negro generation, these opinions relegated "the Doctor" to the status of "the old, me-too-Boss, hat-in-hand Negro generally represented by Robert Russa Moton of Tuskegee."[30] Randolph declared that DuBois was "comparatively ignorant of the world problems of sociological and economic significance." In 1920, the *Messenger* charged that the *Crisis* had an editorial policy of "viciousness, petty meanness" and "suppression [of] facts pertaining to the NAACP." It attacked DuBois' associates, especially field secretary William Pickens, as advocates of "sheer 'claptrap'."[32] It laughed at DuBois' provincial liberalism and staid social conformity. By the end of Wilson's administration, the Justice Department reported that the *Messenger* was "by long odds the most dangerous of all the Negro publications." Throughout Harlem, Randolph and Owen became known as "Lenin and Trotsky," the most revolutionary black Bolsheviks on the scene. Their political break from DuBois seemed complete.[33]

W.E.B. DuBois.

RANDOLPH AND GARVEY

Having declared war against DuBois and the NAACP leadership, Randolph and Owen sought the support of other black activists in Harlem. They needed support because, by their own admission, DuBois remained "the most distinguished Negro in the United States today."[34] Marcus Garvey seemed a likely addition to their struggle against the *Crisis*' editor. Born in Jamaica, Garvey had established his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914. Inspired by the racial "self-help" slogans of Booker T. Washington, the young black nationalist eventually settled in New York City in 1916. Randolph claimed the distinction of having been the first prominent black radical to invite Garvey to Harlem. He recalled years later that "when he finished speaking ... I could tell from watching him then that he was one of the greatest propagandists of his time."[35] Garvey was attracted to Harrison, who by 1917 had left the Socialist party to form his own Left black nationalist movement, the Afro-American Liberty League. Although Garvey was one of the main speakers at the League's first rally on June 12, 1917, he quickly established separate UNIA offices near the *Messenger* on 135th Street. Randolph and Garvey worked together in the International League of Darker Peoples, an organization which demanded that the African territories and colonized nations be represented at the Versailles peace conference. Some Garveyites began to assist Randolph's efforts. Domingo, who was editor of Garvey's *Negro World*, worked as a contributing editor on the *Messenger*.[36] Randolph certainly welcomed Garvey's

public attacks on DuBois as an "antebellum Negro."[37]

The first major disagreement between the black nationalists and Randolph probably occurred over the creation of the Liberty party, an all-black political coalition of former Socialists, Republicans, and Democrats, in late 1920. The stated slogan of the party was "Race First;" it advocated running a black presidential candidate and independent candidates at local levels. Randolph condemned the notion on all conceivable grounds. First, the Negro party was criticized because it had no prospects for support from white workers. "A party that has no hope of becoming a majority has no justification for independent action; for it can never hope to be of positive benefit to its supporters." Second, the party had no economic platform. Third, the proposition of a Negro president was "tragically inane, senseless, foolish, absurd and preposterous. It is inconceivable that alleged intelligent, young colored men could take such obvious, stupendous political folly seriously." Last, the Liberty party consisted of "opportunists, discredited political failures who are now trying to capitalize race prejudice of the Negro." The basis for this vituperative attack was Randolph's view that it was in the interests of "Negro workers to join and vote for the Socialist Party."[38]

It is probable that Harrison's Liberty League supported the new party. Another more menacing factor, of course, was Garvey, who had long been a proponent of an all-black political party.[39] J. W. H. Easton, the UNIA leader for U.S. blacks, was the party's nominee for president.[40] The idea of separate, race-conscious, political organization, rather than the Liberty party per se, was the real issue. Randolph and Owen had begun to view black nationalism as being even more dangerous than the threat presented by DuBois and his *Crisis*.

The *Messenger* began to challenge the Garvey movement for hegemony within Harlem's black working-class population. In December, 1920, Randolph issued an editorial, "The Garvey Movement: A Promise or a Menace," which argued that "the class-struggle nature of the Negro problem" was missing from the UNIA's work. Revolutionary black nationalism "invites an unspeakably violent revulsion of hostile opposition from whites against blacks." In Randolph's view, any all-black organization could "only misdirect the political power of the Negro. All party platforms are chiefly concerned with economic questions" and not with race. Therefore, the *Messenger* concluded, Garvey's entire program "deserves the condemnation and repudiation of all Negroes."[41] Relations with Garveyites swiftly worsened. Randolph insisted that Garvey's advocacy of an independent Africa for the Africans was unrealistic, because the Africans do not possess "the ability ... to assume the responsibilities and duties of a sovereign nation."[42] By mid-1922 the *Messenger* concentrated on opposition to Garvey. "Here's notice that the *Messenger* is firing the opening gun in a campaign to drive Garvey and Garveyism in all its sinister viciousness from the American soil."[43]

Nowhere in the black press of the time was the anti-Garvey campaign expressed so bluntly, and with such anti-West Indian sentiments, as in the *Messenger*. Every significant aspect of Garvey's program was denounced as "foolish," "vicious," "without brains," or "sheer folly." The UNIA's proposal for a Booker T. Washington University will have "neither students nor teachers" since the former "will not trust it to give out knowledge" and the latter will not trust it to give out pay." Garvey's wildest claim, that the UNIA had 4.5 million dues-paying members, proved that he was "a consummate liar or a notorious crook." But Randolph failed to explain the reasons for Garvey's massive popularity among black workers

in Harlem, and ignored the hard evidence of the UNIA's progressive positions on African and international affairs.[44]

RANDOLPH BREAKS WITH BOLSHEVISM

As the Bolshevik Revolution forced the creation of a Third International, Randolph felt himself pulled gradually toward the Right. For the first time in several years he was no longer "the first voice of radical, revolutionary, economic and political action among Negroes in America."[45] Revolutionary black activists outside both UNIA and *Messenger* factions were making political waves across Harlem. In the fall of 1917 Cyril V. Briggs founded the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), a leftist and black nationalist group. A native of the Dutch West Indies and a former editorial writer for the New York *Amsterdam News*, Briggs began to edit his own nationalist journal, the *Crusader*. Many members of the ABB, which included Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Richard B. Moore, and Otto Huiswood, were quickly recruited into the newly formed Workers, or Communist, party. (Harrison did not go over to the Communists, according to Harold Cruse, but he did "assist" them in certain situations.)[46] By 1922, the Communists had begun "to assail Garvey's program as reactionary, escapist and utopian" while simultaneously trying "to influence, collaborate with, or undermine his movement."[47] As Marxist-Leninists, the ABB also attacked Randolph's firm ties with the Socialist party, his reformist and quasi-religious theories for social transformation, his bitter hostility toward black nationalism, and growing tendency toward political and economic conservatism.[48]

The *Messenger* turned on its former Left friends almost as viciously as it had turned against Garvey. Declaring all black Communists "a menace to the workers, themselves and the race," Randolph judged their policies "utterly senseless, unsound, unscientific, dangerous and ridiculous. Black Marxist "extremists" were hopelessly out of touch with the mentality of Negro laborers, since the latter had not "even grasped the fundamentals and necessity of simple trade and industrial unionism!" As further proof that "Communism can be of no earthly benefit to either white or Negro workers," Randolph pointed out that the Soviet Union's new economic policy of "State Capitalism" had replaced the radical socialist economics of the war communist years.[49]

Opposition to "Communists boring into Negro labor" united Randolph and DuBois.[50] Their joint opposition to Garvey's success was even stronger, and drove them back into some collaboration. There was no indication that DuBois had changed his views on any of the major points that had separated him from Randolph during the war. If anything, DuBois' opposition to "State Socialism" and the "class struggle," and his advocacy of black "capital accumulation to effectively fight racism," placed him to the economic right of many Garveyites, and perhaps even Garvey himself at this time.[51] But the distance that had separated Randolph and DuBois had now narrowed due to Garvey's gospel of black nationalism. The *Crisis* and the *Messenger* concurred in opposition to all forms of racial separatism and distrust of Garvey's business methods and honesty.

Working closely with the NAACP's assistant secretary, Walter White, Randolph coordinated an elaborate campaign against Garvey, which included the distribution of anti-Garvey handbills throughout Harlem. In January, 1923, Randolph, Owen, Pickens, and several other black leaders drafted a memorandum to Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty asking for the conviction of Marcus Garvey on charges of mail fraud, various criminal activities, and "racial bigotry." Garvey was eventually con-

victed of mail fraud, and imprisoned in February, 1925. By the late 1920s the UNIA had virtually collapsed, partially due to Randolph's anti-Garvey activities. The irony of this entire episode was that Randolph, a would-be leader of the black working class, had participated in the destruction of the largest black workers and peasants organization in American history.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

Unlike Garvey, Randolph at first met with little success in his efforts to organize black workers. Randolph and Owen created the Friends of Negro Freedom in 1920, a biracial group which promoted black entrance into trade unions and held lectures on economic and political issues. Friends of Negro Freedom included Domingo, Baltimore *Afro-American* newspaper editor Carl Murphy, and black intellectual Archibald Grimke. In 1923 Randolph attempted unsuccessfully to establish a United Negro Trades organization to bring black workers into independent trade unions. Finally, in August, 1925, a few Pullman porters asked Randolph to help them establish the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Despite the fact that several black Pullman employees such as W. H. Des Verney and Ashley Totten had been more instrumental in organizing rank-and-file support for the Brotherhood, Randolph was named president. The initial prospects for this union's success looked just as dim as all the other groups that Randolph had led, however.

Marcus Garvey (second from right) in 1924. Photo by James Van Derzee.

The eleven thousand black porters working on Pullman cars faced the united opposition of the federal government, the Pullman Company, and its black conservative allies.

Given Randolph's early inability to build a successful and popular mass organization of black workers, it is not surprising that he began to reassess his overall theoretical outlook and political practice. Gradually, socialism was given less emphasis in his writings; by 1923 the *Messenger* had succeeded in attracting several black businessmen and merchants to advertise in its pages. Articles by Emmett J. Scott, the former secretary of Booker T. Washington, and even Robert Russa Moton, of Tuskegee, began appearing in the journal.[52] Quietly, editorial policies began to change. In January, 1925, Randolph declared that "Negro businessmen are rapidly rising to the high mark of responsibility." Many black entrepreneurs were "splendid, courteous," and a "*delight* to deal with."[53] Randolph's blanket condemnation of the AFL and his earlier critical descriptions of Gompers — a "conservative, reactionary and chief strikebreaker" — mellowed into fawning praise. The AFL was no longer "a machine for the propagation of race prejudice," but a progressive and democratic force. Randolph banned articles critical of William Green, newly elected AFL leader.[54]

The editors endorsed Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes' five-million-dollar fund drive by defending Washington's position on industrial education against DuBois' Talented Tenth ideal. "Dr. DuBois has probably been responsible for a great deal of misunderstanding about industrial education in America," they argued. "We need more brick masons, carpenters, plasterers, plumbers, than we do physicians; more cooks than lawyers; more tailors and dressmakers than pupils."[55] Yet there were only 40,000 black secondary and elementary teachers, 3,200 black physicians and 900 black lawyers in the United States at this time. Only 50 percent of black children between the ages of five and twenty were enrolled in school; 25 percent of all adult blacks in the South were illiterate.[56] Randolph had moved toward a defense of private property and capitalism — a posture which he would never relinquish.

Thus Randolph persuaded the Brotherhood to apply for an international charter from the AFL in 1928, after it had spent several years as an independent, all-black union. The AFL rejected the application for equal membership, and instead proposed a "compromise" of "federal union" status inside the organization. Despite criticism from leftists, black workers, and some journalists, Randolph agreed to these terms. Both parties got something in the deal: Green and the AFL acquired a major black union, silencing their Marxist and black critics like DuBois; Randolph received the promise of assistance from organized white labor in his growing struggle with the Pullman Company.

Randolph built the Brotherhood with characteristic enthusiasm. Appeals to porters to join were made in racial and religious terms. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free," was the slogan on Brotherhood stationery. In language reminiscent of some Garveyites, the Brotherhood's literature declared its faith in God and the Negro race: "Fight on brave souls! Long live the Brotherhood! Stand upon thy feet and the God of Truth and Justice and Victory will speak unto thee!"[57] Randolph's efforts to organize the porters received a boost in 1926, when the Garland Fund, administered by the American Civil Liberties Union, donated $10,000 to the Brotherhood. The money allowed Randolph to hire Frank W. Crosswaith, a West Indian Socialist and graduate of the Party's Rand School in New York City, as a professional organizer and executive secretary of the Brotherhood.[58] Randolph also benefitted from many intelligent and creative

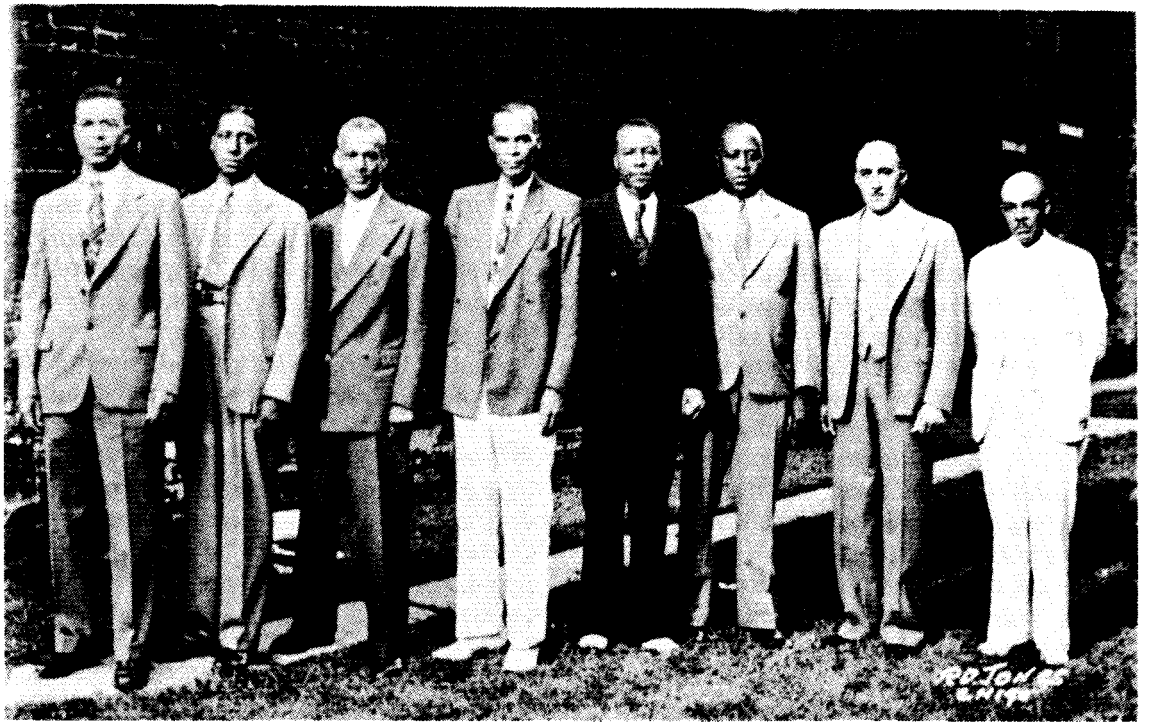
leaders among the porters: Morris "Dad" Moore and C. L. Dellums of Oakland; T. T. Patterson of New York City; Des Verney, and Totten. Chief among them was Milton Webster. Two years Randolph's senior, he had been fired by Pullman because of his militancy. In the twenties he became a bailiff and was one of Chicago's influential black Republican leaders. As assistant general organizer of the Brotherhood and chief organizer for the Chicago area, next only to Randolph, the aggressive yet politically conservative Webster became the major spokesperson for the porters.[59]

Randolph's leadership was soon tested against the Pullman Company. After the Board of Mediation, established by the Railway Labor Act of 1926, ruled the following year that the parties could not reach an agreement and recommended voluntary arbitration, Randolph's only alternative was to call a strike to force Pullman Company into collective bargaining. The strike was set for June 8, 1928.[61]

Across the country, porters were excited at the prospect of a confrontation between themselves and the Pullman Company. Despite red-baiting against Randolph, random firings, and veiled threats, the porters backed the Brotherhood leadership almost unanimously. The strike vote, 6,053 to 17, astonished even Randolph. Some porters made plans for a long siege, even blocking the use of strikebreakers. Ashley Totten and his associates in Kansas City began collecting "sawed-off shotguns, railroad iron taps, boxes of matches, knives and billy clubs" and storing them in a local black-owned building. Facing the prospect of an extensive and probably violent strike which would disrupt Pullman railroad service nationwide, Randolph began to have doubts. Could an all-black workers' strike succeed without some measure of white trade-union and working-class support? Three hours before the scheduled strike, Green sent Randolph a telegram stating that "conditions were not favorable" for a strike. He suggested that the Brotherhood engage in "a campaign of education and public enlightenment regarding the justice of your cause." Randolph called the strike off.[62]

It is difficult to know whether the strike would have been successful. Throughout the remainder of his life, Randolph insisted that the possibilities were nil. The historical evidence points in the opposite direction, however. William H. Harris' research on Brotherhood correspondence suggests that Webster had a great deal of difficulty in convincing his local members not to strike by themselves. "Aside from disruption of peak travel, what could be more damaging to interstate commerce than to tie up the rails during the time when both national political parties were holding conventions in such remote cities as Houston and Kansas City?" Harris asked. "Even the Pullman Company recognized this as a potential danger."[63] The union was "in shambles after the abortive strike." The *Messenger* was forced to halt publication; porters lost confidence in the Brotherhood and stopped paying their regular dues. Black newspapers like the New York *Argus* attacked the leadership of "A. Piffle Randolph."[64] The Communists accused him of "betraying Negro workers in the interest of the labor fakers."[65] The American Negro Labor Congress charged that Randolph had "forsaken the policy of militant struggle in the interest of the workers for the policy of class collaboration with the bosses and bluffing with the strike." Within four years, the Brotherhood's membership declined from almost 7,000 to only 771 in 1932.[66]

It was only in April, 1937 that the Pullman Company agreed to bargain seriously with the Brotherhood. On August 25 of that same year Pullman agreed to reduce the porters' monthly work load from 400 to 240 hours, and provide a substantial pay increase. But many of his



Officers of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in the 1930s: unknown, Bennie Smith, Ashley Totten, T.T. Patterson, Randolph, Milton P. Webster, C.L. Dellums, and E.J. Bradley.

critics, black and white, suggested that these and other accomplishments would have been achieved much sooner if A. Philip Randolph had had a little less faith in the system and a little more confidence in the militancy of the black working class.

NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLES

In the Depression, Randolph again exhibited courage and some of his former political independence. Contrary to DuBois, Randolph charged that "the New Deal is no remedy" to black people's problems. It did not "change the profit system," nor "place human rights above property rights." Assisted by Alain Locke, Ralph Bunche and other left-oriented black intellectuals, Randolph initiated the National Negro Congress in February, 1936. Hundreds of black trade unionists, radical civic reformers and communists participated in a black united front in blunt opposition both to Roosevelt's "welfare capitalism" and to the do-nothing acquiescence of the NAACP. Despite the breakup of the Congress in the early 1940s over the issue of "Communist control," the organization represented one of the most advanced coalitions of black activists ever assembled.[67]

With the onset of World War II in Europe, the Roosevelt administration began expanding production in defense industries. Prior to America's direct involvement in the war, thousands of new jobs were created in industrial, clerical, and technical fields related to wartime production. Black workers were largely kept out of these positions because of a tacit policy of Jim Crow followed by white labor, big business, and the federal government. Although Congress had forbidden racial discrimi-

nation in the appropriation of funds for defense training, the law was essentially a dead letter. With Randolph's resignation from the National Negro Congress in 1940, he turned his energies toward the issue of black employment in defense industries with federal contracts. Working again with Walter White, who by this time was Secretary and dictatorial leader of the NAACP, Randolph sought to influence Roosevelt to initiate action against white racism.

By January, 1941, Randolph was prepared to take what was, for that time, radical action. Randolph urged blacks to organize a militant march in Washington D.C. on July 1 to protest the discrimination against black workers. The idea of a "March on Washington Movement" seized the imagination of the black working class, the unemployed, and even the petty bourgeoisie. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was the central force behind the campaign. Hundreds of March-on-Washington Movement meetings were held in black churches, union halls, and community centers. With able support, Randolph succeeded in committing over 100,000 black people to the march. Foner observes that the "March on Washington Movement represented the first occasion in American history when a black labor organization assumed leadership of the struggle of the Negro masses on a national scale and became the spokesman for all black Americans, conservative and radical alike." Neither Garvey, Washington, nor DuBois had ever succeeded in forging a popular coalition of the black business and professional elites, the working class, and rural blacks toward a single, progressive cause.

The driving force behind the 1941 March on Washington was black nationalism. Taking another page from Garvey's book, Randolph insisted that only blacks participate in the march. It was important for blacks to show white America that they were able to build an effective, militant, national organization without white assistance. C. L. Dellums explained that the Brotherhood informed its "white friends over the country why this had to be a Negro march. It had to be for the inspiration of Negroes yet unborn." White progressives and trade unionists were asked to offer "moral support, to stand on the sidelines and cheer us on."[68]

The demand for an end to discrimination in defense plants appealed to the typical black industrial worker who, like porters in the 1920s, was on the verge of class consciousness. But its expression among blacks was nationalism, a force involving religious, cultural, and ethnic qualities which Randolph was forced to deal with in a concrete manner. Randolph's biographer emphasizes that "a certain strain of black nationalism ... ran through his social and religious heritage." Not surprisingly, "when the chips were down," Randolph had to return to his own origins to find the means to understand his own constituency and to articulate their aspirations. His biographer writes, "It is a wonder that black nationalism did not become the central activating force and principle of Randolph's political life."[69]

Roosevelt used his considerable power to force the organizers to stop the march. As black workers in Harlem, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and every major city prepared for the confrontation, Roosevelt finally agreed to sign an executive order prohibiting the "discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries because of race, creed, color or national origin." The Democratic administration promised to create the Fair Employment Practices Committee, a commission which would supervise the compliance of federal contractors with the executive order. Although this was not everything that the March on Washington Movement had asked for, Randolph and other leaders agreed to call off the demonstration on June 24.[70]

Historians August Meier and Elliott Rudwick point to the March on Washington Movement as the real foundation for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. "Though its career was brief, the former organization prefigured things to come in three ways," they note. It was, first, "an avowedly all-Negro movement;' second, it involved the direct "action of the black masses;" third, "it concerned itself with the economic problems of the urban slum-dwellers."[71] Two additional points can be made. The FEPC was the beginning of today's Federal Office of Contracts Compliance Programs, the Department of Labor's affirmative-action watchdog. The principle of equal opportunity for black people in employment was, for the first time, considered a civil right. Randolph's ideology behind the march also "prefigures" the 1950-60s because of the impact of Gandhi's approach to social change. In an address before March-on-Washington associates given in Detroit in September, 1942, Randolph called attention to "the strategy and maneuver of the people of India with mass civil disobedience and non-cooperation." Huge, nonviolent demonstrations "in theatres, hotels, restaurants, and amusement places" could be a potential means to gain full equality. Years before Martin Luther King, Jr., Randolph envisioned the basic principles of *satyagraha* applied to the fight against Jim Crow.

Yet for all his foresight and commitment to the ideals of black struggle, Randolph's subsequent political behavior did little to promote the creation of a permanent organization. The March-on-Washington Movement's last major conference was in October, 1946, and it lapsed completely the next year. Randolph's ongoing fights with AFL officials still produced meager results. As in the past, Randolph's failure to carry out the threat of militant action compromised the pursuit of his long-range goals. Even at the peak of his influence throughout black America, during the March-on-Washington Movement of 1940-41, Randolph failed to establish a mass-based, permanent force which promoted his rhetorical commitment to democratic socialism and black economic equality. Again and again, especially later in his career, he failed to trust the deep militancy of the black working-class masses, relying instead upon tactical agreements with white presidents, corporate executives, and labor bureaucrats. Curiously, like Booker T. Washington, Randolph always preferred class compromise to class struggle.

With the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, Randolph's creative contributions to the struggle for black freedom had largely ended. Like other labor leaders and socialists such as Norman Thomas, Randolph capitulated to the posture of extreme anti-Communism. Randolph and Thomas travelled to the Far East lecturing against the evils of radical trade unionism, for instance, under what later was revealed to be the auspices of the CIA. Randolph became an acknowledged "elder statesman" during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s. Making his peace with those black leaders he had formerly opposed in the NAACP and Urban League, he had little to offer in the way of guidance or political theory to a new generation of black radicals, the rebels of SNCC, CORE and SCLC. Ironically, it was during this period that DuBois, now in his eighties, moved toward a thoroughly radical condemnation of America's political economy. The old so-called "political opportunist" had become the active proponent of world peace and international liberation, while his "Young Turk" critic had become a defender of the conservative status quo.

Since the 1960s, Randolph's role in the AFL-CIO hierarchy has been filled by his trusted assistant, Bayard Rustin. Like his mentor, Rustin is a socialist and pacifist with a long history

of principled and at times even courageous struggle. As a participant in CORE's "Journey of Reconciliation" campaign of 1946, he tested local Jim Crow laws by sitting in white sections on interstate buses in the South. With other early "freedom riders" he received a thirty-day jail term on a North Carolina chain gang. Rustin was one of the major organizers of the 1963 March on Washington, and inspired a generation of younger black activists like SNCC's Stokeley Carmichael and Phil Hutchings. But when he became head of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, founded by George Meany and the AFL-CIO in 1965, he acquired the language and outlook of white labor's elites. Rustin bitterly denounced Malcolm X as a "racist,"[72] and condemned the Black Power movement as "anti-white" and "inconsistent." Rustin and Randolph defended the Vietnam War and criticized King for linking domestic civil rights with America's involvement in Southeast Asia.

A "silent parade" through New York's Union Square, July 1942, sponsored by the March on Washington Movement.

AMERICA MUST STOP LAWLESS LYNCHINGS
KEEP JIM-CROW OUT
KEEP OUT OF AIR
NO COLOR LINE ON THE ASSEMBLY LINE
15,000,000 NEGROES DEMAND EQUALITY
MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK GIVE US JOBS!
WE DEMAND...
ENFORCEMENT OF 5th, 14th, 15th AMENDMENTS
LET NEGROES SERVE DEMOCRACY NOW
FOR JUSTICE AND MANHOOD THE POLL TAX MUST GO
WE PROTEST UNFAIR LYNCHING OF ODELL WALLER.
HIGHLY THAT OUR HALL NOT DIED VAIN.
ABOLISH THE POLL TAX SYSTEM.
THE POLL TAX

In the 1970s Rustin's position within the black movement drifted increasingly toward the Right. At the September, 1972 convention of the International Association of Machinists, he attacked black rank-and-file activists and defended the AFL-CIO's shabby record on integration. The next year he was critical of the creation of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, arguing that the Randolph Institute should be viewed as the "catalyst" for black advancement in union leadership positions. On the international front, at the time of Randolph's death in 1979, Rustin participated in a "Freedom House" delegation to Zimbabwe which declared that the white minority regime's fraudulent elections were democratic. Cruse analyzed him best in 1968, observing that "Rustin's problem is that in thirty years he has learned nothing new. He has done nothing creative in radical theory in American terms...."[3] Put another way, Rustin is a victim of what Marx postulated in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte;" that "all great personages occur, as it were, twice — the first time as tragedy, the second as farce." Randolph's life is tragic, because of his greatness and yet untapped potential. Rustin's is a caricature, in another historical period, of that lost greatness.

Despite Randolph's changes and shifting images certain consistencies remain. Throughout his career, Randolph perceived union organizing as a "top-down" rather than a mass-based strategy. Although he was not a porter, he asked for, and received, the presidency of the Brotherhood in 1925; he left the presidency of the National Negro Congress after realizing that he could no longer control the leftists in it. He consistently preferred compromise and gradual reform to confrontation and class/race struggle. The capitulation of the Brotherhood's 1928 strike and the 1941 March on Washington were the most outstanding instances, but not the only ones. He made a similar compromise in December 1965, after the establishment of the Randolph Institute. After years of criticizing the racial policies of the AFL-CIO, Randolph reversed himself at the San Francisco national convention by announcing that racism had virtually disappeared from organized labor.

Another of Randolph's central characteristics was his inability to appreciate the relationship between black nationalism, black culture, and the struggle for socialism. Randolph and Owen's editorials in the *Messenger* declared that "unions are not based upon race lines, but upon class lines," and that "the history of the labor movement in America proves that the employing class recognize no race lines." This crude and historically false oversimplification led Randolph into pragmatic alliances not only with the white Marxists, but also with the AFL after 1923, and later the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. His successes in winning higher wages and shorter working hours for the Brotherhood were achieved at the expense of building an autonomous, all-black protest movement which was critical of both racism and capitalism. The *Messenger*'s vicious attacks against Garvey did not stop hundreds of thousands of rural and urban black workers from defending black nationalism. Randolph was ill-equipped to understand the rank-and-file revolt of black industrial workers in the past two decades who were influenced by Malcolm X, Franz Fanon, and their Black Power disciples.

Cruse's comments on the entire generation of Harlem radicals, both in politics and the arts, are an appropriate critique of Randolph as well. Because "the Negro intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance could not see the implications of cultural revolution as a political demand," Cruse notes, "they failed to grasp the radical potential of their own movement." Like the Renaissance poets and novelists, Ran-

dolph was hesitant to place black culture, ethnicity and nationalism on the same agenda with other social and political concerns. "Having no cultural philosophy of their own, they remained under the tutelage of irrelevant white radical ideas."[74]

This same assessment was also made by DuBois in 1933. He criticized the literary Renaissance as "literature written for the benefit of white readers, and starting primarily from the white point of view. It never had a real Negro constituency and it did not grow out of the inmost heart and frank experience of Negroes. . . ."[75] Similarly, Randolph's economic determinism, his political pattern of compromise and reconciliation, his narrow definitions of class and culture, proved harmful throughout his entire career. In the first Negro March on Washington when he did turn to the black workers with an avowedly nationalistic style and a program for political confrontation of the segregationist status quo, he was dramatically successful. When he overcame his Socialist party training and used the language of the black church and Southern black political protest traditions to appeal to his Brotherhood's rank-and-file, he reached a potentially revolutionary force. But his ambiguous hostility toward the Negro's nationalism negated the full potential of his efforts.

Randolph's contribution to the ongoing struggle for black self determination was unique and important. His activities in creating the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the National Negro Congress, and the March on Washington Movement of 1940-41 were necessary preconditions for the black activism of the 1950s and 1960s. Harold Cruse is correct that "not a single Negro publication in existence today matches the depth of the old *Messenger*." Randolph was the first great leader of the black urban working class. But unlike DuBois, he was unable to reevaluate himself and his movement dialectically; ultimately he became a prisoner of his own limited vision for black America.

Bayard Rustin and Randolph announcing plans for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 1963.

In the next stage of history, black working people and activists must transcend Randolph's contradictions. If they succeed, as they must, they will begin to realize the possibilities of socialism within the means and relations of production. In doing so, they will carry out the legacy of Randolph that he was unable to achieve for himself and his own generation.

NOTES

The photos on pp. 6, 10, 14, 20, and 25 are taken from Jervis Anderson, A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait *(New York, 1972).*

1. Irwin Silber, "Randolph: What was his Role?" *Guardian* (May, 1979).
2. Jervis Anderson's biography, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (New York, 1972), examines the black socialist's personal and political life. There are two excellent sources on the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: William H. Harris' recent study, *Keeping*

the Faith: A. Philip Randolph, Milton P. Webster, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (Urbana, Chicago and London; 1977), and Brailsford R. Brazael, *The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: Its Origin and Development* (New York, 1946). Theodore Kornweibel's Ph.D. dissertation, "The *Messenger* Magazine, 1917-1928" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1971), examines Randolph's early years as a political activist.

The list of popular and scholarly articles published about Randolph or his role in the black movement are almost endless. See, for example, L. W. Thomas, "Three Negroes Receive 1964 Presidential Freedom Medal," *Negro History Bulletin* (December, 1964), 58-9; M. Kempton, "A. Philip Randolph," *New Republic* (July 6, 1963), 15-17; Arna Bontemps, "Most Dangerous Negro in America," *Negro Digest* (September, 1961), 3-8; John Henrik Clarke, "Portrait of an AfroAmerican Radical," *Negro Digest* (March, 1967), 16-23; A. Morrison, "A. Philip Randolph: Dean of Negro Leaders," *Ebony* (November, 1958), 103-104.

3. Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973* (New York, 1974), 129-135.
4. *Ibid.*, 169-172.
5. *Ibid.*, 164-166, 171-172.
6. *Ibid.*, 147-160.
7. J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 32, 50, 51, 52.
8. *Ibid.*, 76-77; W. Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, 28-29. In 1944 Randolph commented that his "extensive reading of Socialist literature" was one of the "fundamental forces that had shaped his life." The Socialist party theorists and authors he named included Morris Hillquit, Algernon Lee, Norman Thomas, Frank Crosswaith and Eugene V. Debs. Until 1964, when he voted for Lyndon Johnson, he had consistently endorsed the Socialist party ticket. J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 343.
9. J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 79-82.
10. *Ibid.*, 48, 59.
11. Editorial, "Some Negro Ministers," *Messenger* (March, 1920), 3.
12. J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 25. Randolph stopped attending church within a year after his arrival in Harlem in 1911. But in December, 1957, the Reverend Richard Allen Hildebrand, an AME minister in Harlem received a request from Randolph to become a member of his church. Randolph seldom attended, if ever; nevertheless, he probably rested somewhat easier with the spiritual knowledge that he was a member.
13. J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 97-98.
14. *Ibid.*, 107-109.
15. "The Bolsheviki," *Messenger* (January, 1918), 7.
16. "The Russian Triumph," *Messenger* (March, 1920), 3-4. Randolph's mechanistic, economic determinism is evident in his faulty commentary on the Bolsheviks and the coming American revolution. "The Government of the United States . . . is located in Wall Street. When the large combinations of wealth — the trusts, monopolies and cartels are broken up . . . a new government will then spring forth just as the Soviet Government was an inevitable consequence of the breaking up of the great estates of Russia and assigning the land to the peasants, and the factories to the workers. It is as impossible to have a political machine which does not reflect the economic organization of a country, as it is to make a sewing machine grind flour." "The Negro Radicals," *Messenger* (October, 1919), 17.
17. Editorial, *Messenger* (September, 1919), 9-10.
18. J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 92-96.
19. "When British Capitalism Falls," *Messenger* (March, 1920), 3.
20. One of DuBois' most controversial prowar editorials was "Close Ranks," published in the July, 1918, issue of the *Crisis*. He argued, "Let us, while this war lasts, forget our social grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy."
21. Chandler Owen, "The Failure of the Negro Leaders," *Messenger* (January, 1918), 23.
22. Randolph, "W.E.B. DuBois," *Messenger* (July, 1918), 27-28; editorial, *Messenger* (March, 1919), 21-22.
23. W.E.B. DuBois, "Socialism is Too Narrow for Negroes," *Socialist Call* (January 21, 1912); DuBois, "A Field for Socialists," *New Review* (January 11, 1913), 54-57; DuBois, "Socialism and the Negro Problem," *New Review* (February 1, 1913), 138-141. This does not mean that DuBois disavowed socialism. In May, 1914, DuBois joined the editorial board of the Socialist party's journal, *New Review*. His criticisms of some Socialists' explicitly racist platforms in the South did not lessen his intellectual commitment to socialist economic goals.
24. W.E.B. DuBois, "The Black Man and the Unions," *Crisis* (March, 1918).
25. W.E.B. DuBois, "The African Roots of the War," *Atlantic Monthly* (May, 1915), 707-714.
26. W.E.B. DuBois, "The Reward," *Crisis* (September, 1918).
27. W.E.B. DuBois, "The World Last Month," *Crisis* (March, 1917).
28. W.E.B. DuBois, *Crisis* (September, 1917), 215.
29. W.E.B. DuBois, "The Negro and Radical Thought," *Crisis* (July, 1921). DuBois' attitude toward the Bolshevik revolution warms as Randolph's attitude

wanes. See DuBois' "Opinion" on Russia, *Crisis* (April, 1922), 247-252 and his essay, "The Black Man and Labor," *Crisis* (December, 1925), where he states, "We should stand before the astounding effort of Soviet Russia to reorganize the industrial world with an open mind and listening ears."

30. "The Crisis of the *Crisis*," *Messenger* (July, 1919), 10.

31. J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 100-101; *Ibid.*, 10.

32. "A Record of the Darker Races," *Messenger* (September, 1920), 84-85; Owen, "The Failure of the Negro Leaders," 23.

33. J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 115-119.

34. "W.E.B. DuBois," *Messenger* (July, 1918), 27.

35. J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 122.

36. *Ibid.*, 122-123; Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport, Connecticut, 1976), 9-10. On the Garvey Movement, also see Amy Jacques-Garvey, editor, *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, Volumes I and II, Reprinted (New York, 1977).

37. Martin, *Race First*, 182. After Harrison's newspaper, *The Voice*, closed in 1919, Garvey offered him a position on the *Negro World*. During 1920-1921 Harrison was "joint editor" of the paper. Martin, *Race First*, 92.

38. "A Negro Party," *Messenger* (November, 1920), 130-131.

39. Martin, *Race First*, 320.

40. "The Garvey Movement: A Promise or a Menace," *Messenger* (December, 1920), 171. Throughout the entire history of the *Messenger* one finds an antinationalistic bias. Randolph and Owen even took the extreme position that the greatest danger to American socialism and the trade union movement was not the racist, conservative white worker, but the Negro! "Negroes must learn to differentiate between white capitalists and white workers," the editors declared. Since they do not, "this makes the Negro both a menace to the radicals and the capitalists. For inasmuch as he thinks that all white men are his enemies, he is as inclined to direct his hate at white employers as he is to direct it at white workers." In the *Messenger*'s opinion, the only hope was for organized labor to "harness the discontent of Negroes and direct it into the working-class channels for working-class emancipation." "The Negro — A Menace to Radicalism," *Messenger* (May-June, 1919), 20.

41. *Ibid.*, 170-172.

42. Editorial, *Messenger* (November, 1922), 523.

43. Editorial, *Messenger* (July, 1922), 437.

44. A. Philip Randolph, "The Only Way to Redeem Africa," *Messenger* (January, 1923), 568-570, and (February, 1923), 612-614. DuBois' comments against the Garvey organization were provocative. He defended the *Negro World* against Attorney General Palmer's attacks during the Red Summer of 1919, and in late 1920 described Garvey as "an honest and sincere man with a tremendous vision, great dynamic force, stubborn determination and unselfish desire to serve." In 1921, he admitted that the "main lines" of the UNIA's activities "are perfectly feasible." It was only in 1922 and 1923, when Garvey began to consider the Ku Klux Klan as a potential ally to the black liberation movement, that DuBois registered his strongest denunciations. See "Radicals," *Crisis* (December, 1919); "Marcus Garvey," a two-part essay in *Crisis* (December, 1920) and (January, 1921); "Back to Africa," *Century Magazine* (February, 1923), 539-548.

45. J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 82.

46. Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York, 1967), 45, 75. At its peak in 1921, the ABB had 2,500 members in fifty-six chapters throughout the country. It demanded the right for black self defense, "absolute race equality," a "free Africa," and political suffrage. In many respects, its platform was strikingly similar to the agendas of Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity, over forty years later. See "Cyril Briggs and the African Blood Brotherhood," WPA Writers' Project Number 1, Schomberg Collection, New York Public Library.

47. *Ibid.*, 46.

48. The final break between the black Marxist-Leninists and Social Democrats does not come in early 1919, as many have suggested, but much later. As late as mid-1920 Briggs was a participant in Randolph's Friends of Negro Freedom. Martin, *Race First*, 320.

49. "The Menace of Negro Communists," *Messenger* (August, 1923), 784. The division between black Socialists and Communists tended to be along ethnic as well as political lines. Cruse observes that "after 1919, the split among Negro Socialists tended to take a more or less American Negro vs. West Indian Negro character. The Americans, led by Randolph, refused to join the Communists, while the West Indians — Moore, Briggs and Huiswoud — did." There were several exceptions; Fort-Whiteman, an American, joined the Communists. It is interesting to note that Cruse does not fully discuss the fate of Harrison, a revolutionary socialist who abandoned the Socialist party because of its racism and never joined the Marxist-Leninists; a black nationalist who nevertheless did not wholeheartedly embrace the Garvey phenomenon. His primary concerns were generating

independent black political activity and developing a greater race-consciousness among all socialists. See H. Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 118.

50. DuBois, "Communists Boring into Negro Labor," *New York Times* (January 17, 1926), 1-2.
51. DuBois, "Socialism and the Negro," *Crisis* (October, 1921), 245; DuBois, "The Class Struggle," *Crisis* (August, 1921l), 151.
52. Emmett J. Scott, "The Business Side of a University," *Messenger* (November, 1923), 864. Early in its career, the *Messenger* was not reticent in its denunciations of Moton. "Moton has neither the courage, education or the opportunity to do anything fundamental in the interest of the Negro," Randolph declared in 1919. "He counsels satisfaction, not intelligent discontent; he is ignorant of the fact that progress has taken place among any people in proportion as they have become discontented with their position...." "Robert Russa Moton," *Messenger* (July, 1919), 31.
53. "High Types of Negro Business Men," *Messenger* (January, 1925), 21.
54. "Samuel Gompers," *Messenger* (March, 1919), 22; "Why Negroes Should Join the I.W.W.," *Messenger* (July, 1919), 8; and "Unionizing of Negro Workers," *Messenger* (October, 1919), 8-10.
55. "The Knowledge Trust," *Messenger* (May, 1925), 197, 209.
56. "Black Persons in Selected Professional Occupations, 1890-1970;" "Percent of Persons 5 to 20 Years Old Enrolled in School;" and "Illiteracy in the Population 14 Years Old and Over for Selected Years," in U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *The Social and Economic Status of the Black Population in the United States: An Historical View, 1790-1978* (Washington, D.C., 1979), 76, 89, 91.
57. Brazeal, *The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters*, 40. At this time Randolph also began a modest effort within the AFL to drum up support for the Brotherhood's position against Pullman. See Randolph, "Case of the Pullman Porter," *American Federationist* (November, 1926), 1334-1339.
58. *Ibid.*, 18; J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 140. Crosswaith eventually became a member of New York City's Housing Authority, appointed by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia in the early forties. Earlier, he had been a leading political opponent of Marcus Garvey, and revolutionary Socialist party theorist.
59. J. Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 171-174; Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, 76, 78-79, 91. It is significant to note that DuBois had anticipated Randolph's interest in the porters by at least a decade. In a brief essay for the *New York Times*, DuBois suggested that the porters should organize as a union and strike for higher wages and better working conditions. See DuBois, "The Pullman Porter," *New York Times* (March 16, 1914), 5.
60. Robert L. Vann, conservative black editor of the Pittsburgh *Courier*, argued that "the company will not deal with [Randolph] because of his history as a socialist. It is known that American capital will not negotiate with socialists." *Courier* (April 14, 1927). A more fundamental reason was provided by one lower level Pullman boss to his black employees: "Remember, this is a white man's country, white people run it, will keep on running it, and this company will never sit down around the same table with Randolph as long as he's black." J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 181.
61. Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, 110; Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 183-184.
62. Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, 111; Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 185.
63. Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, 112.
64. *Ibid.*, 113, 114.
65. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 184.
66. J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 204-205. It should be noted as well that after 1928 Randolph remained "the dominant figure" in the Brotherhood, but no longer wielded "absolute power." Webster demanded and won the right to have all major union decisions made within the Brotherhood's Policy Committee, which he chaired. Historian William H. Harris describes Randolph as the union's "national black leader," whereas Webster was "a union organizer. Randolph thought in wider terms; he saw the problem of black sin the totality of American society, whereas Webster thought mainly of the porters and of finding ways to improve their conditions at Pullman."
67. Ralph J. Bunche, "A Critical Analysis of the Tactics and Programs of Minority Groups," *Journal of Negro Education*, (1935), 308-320; Ralph J. Bunche, "The Programs of Organizations Devoted to the Improvement of the Status of the American Negro," *Journal of Negro Education*, (1939), 539-50; A. Philip Randolph, "The Trade Union Movement and the Negro," *Journal of Negro Education*, (1936), 54-58; Walter Green Daniel, "A National Negro Congress," *Journal of Negro Education*, (1936); A. Philip Randolph, "Why I Would Not Stand for Re-Election as President of the National Negro Congress," *American Federationist* (July, 1940), 24-25.
68. J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 254.
69. *Ibid.*, 254-255.
70. *Ibid.*, 241-261.

71. August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto*, Revised Edition (New York, 1970).
72. On the question of Malcolm, we confront again the inconsistencies of Randolph's views on black nationalism. According to one source, Randolph was "a friend and admirer of Malcolm" even during his years as minister of Harlem's Temple Number Seven of the Nation of Islam. In 1962, Randolph invited him to serve on the Committee on Social and Economic Unity, a multiethnic coalition in Harlem. When several conservative black ministers threatened to leave when Malcolm arrived, Randolph replied that he would leave immediately if Malcolm was denied a voice on the committee. See Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 13-14.
73. Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution* (New York, 1968).
74. Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 65.
75. W.E.B. DuBois, "The Field and Function of the Negro College," in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *The Education of Black People, Ten Critiques, 1906-1960* (New York, 1973), 95-96.

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conditions: five
the black women's issue

Available August, 1979

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C.Y.S.T.

Thinly disguised fictionalization of notorious labor racketeer's rise to power. C.Y.S.T. (Cadre of Young Socialist Truckers) details the life and trials of a young U.P.S. driver who falls in love with a militant textile worker and is indoctrinated by her into Socialism. His ever-compromising rise to union leadership with the aid of leftist infiltrators and a fifth-column politician brings him into a confrontation with the H.U.A.C. in 1954. At that time, he admits his treason. Sentenced to prison, the hero (Henry Winkler) converts to Christianity and begins counseling young college leftists. Also starring Jeff Bridges, Jane Fonda, Rip Torn, Dennis Hopper and Bruce Dern. "A film that... belabors... all," Kleinhans, *Jumpcut*. (U.S.-Italian, 1976, Color, 105 min.)

SUNDAY NIGHT FEVER

Compelling story of 30-year-old radical and bookstore clerk, John Revolta, whose secret desire is to make it big on the disco floor. The Catch? Sunday is the one night he doesn't have a meeting — and the discos are empty... until May Day weekend, and a 32-year-old social worker, comes along. Set designer's miracle transforms Cambridge's Joy of Movement Center into the "club." Starring Rip Torn, Jane Fonda, John Belushi and Bruce Dern. "Firm dance class stand," Silber, *Guardian*. Directed by Frank Trufaux-pas. (U.S., 1977, Color, 90 min.) Soundtrack album available on Paredon Records.

BLACK SUNDAE

Much maligned thriller about radicalized sports pros who attempt to disrupt the Super Bowl as symbol of sports exploitation in capitalist America. Script by Jack Scott. Footage of vermin infested locker rooms is muck-raking extraordinaire. Little known fact that the film was also an attempt to satirize U.S. airline industry. Bruce Dern, O. J. Simpson. (U.S., 1976, Color, 97 min.)

OVERBITE

Another thriller, also much maligned in straight and left press. Heart-rending story of a shark, radicalized by slaughter of whales and porpoises in North Atlantic, who seeks to disrupt vacation industry along East Coast of U.S. C.I.A.-funded oceanographic "expert" mysteriously turns up (his source of funding is never revealed) and assists in use of neutron bomb to kill the shark. Roy Scheider, Robert Shaw and Bruce Dern as the Shark. (U.S., 1978, Color, 95 min.)

SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY

Never before seen uncut version of the movie classic featuring footage that was removed for commercial distribution. Mitty's censored daydreams include union organizer, service in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, socialist candidate for president, and more. "A must for all timid radicals," Biskind, *Seven Days*. "Forget the ending, the daydreams are so realistic you'll be mesmerized," Aufderheide, ITT. (U.S., 1947, Black and White, 88 min.)

WORRIERS

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THE WORRIERS

Penetrating portrayal of group of neurotic middle-class teenagers trapped by their fear of the dark into riding the New York subways for 24 hours. Blasted by many critics for the alleged unnecessarily tedious nature of their conversations, the film nonetheless stands as a bleak monument to the aftereffects of a psychoanalyzed generation. Starring Randy Quaid, Dustin Hoffman, Peter Fonda and John Belushi with Jack Lemmon as the Conductor. Original soundtrack by Joan Baez (including her hit single, "The Night They Rode Old D Train Down"). WARNING: DUE TO REPEATED INSTANCES OF DEPRESSION AMONG YOUNG VIEWERS, THE PRODUCER HAS ENGAGED THE SERVICES OF LOCAL CHILD PSYCHOLOGISTS TO MONITOR AUDIENCES. (U.S., 1979, Color, 90 min.)

DAYS OF HEAVEN CAN WAIT

Entrancingly photographed in the farm fields of the Southwest, this is the touching story of four field workers who are accidentally buried by an automated harvester, bundled and shipped to Russia in a huge grain deal. When they manage to sickle their way to freedom, they find themselves on an agricultural commune in the Ukraine. Enraptured with the simple life and industriousness of the yogurt-eating farmers, the four renounce their U.S. citizenship and join hands with the local work brigade. Starring Donald Sutherland, Brooke Adams, Farrah Fawcett and James Caan. "Definitely one of THEIR films," Silber, NNMLC newsletter. (U.S., 1978, Color, 110 min.)

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE FOURTH KIND

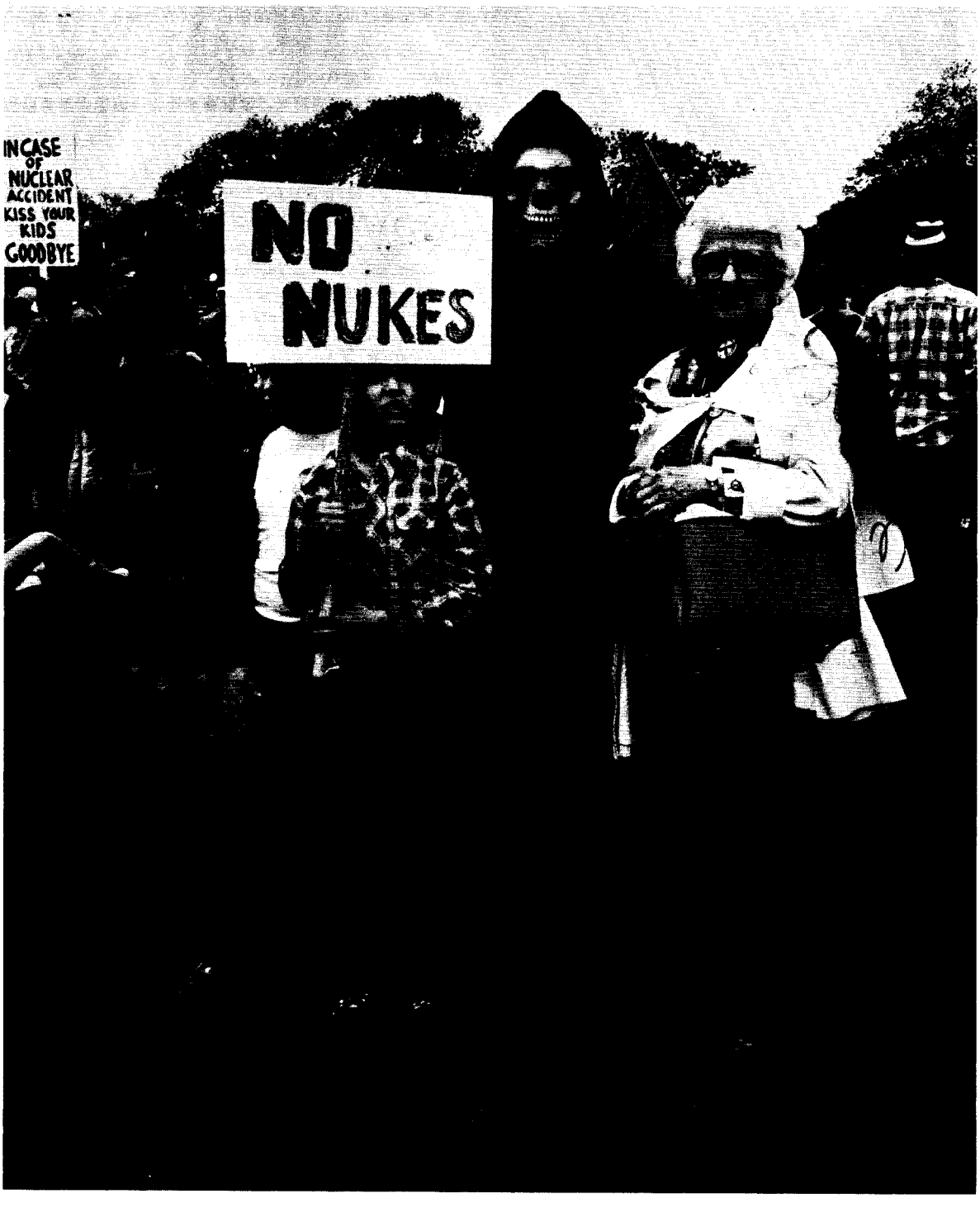
Attacked in the Western press as "spaghetti-science fiction," and banned in New Hampshire and 26 other states, this searing, epic work firmly places itself in the vanguard of the nouveau-cinema. Filmed on location in Algeria, the film documents the arrival, encounters, interactions and ultimate organizing of a group of extra-terrestials in a socialist country. Filmed in black and white to underscore bourgeois-decadent "special effects," it stars Vanessa Redgrave, Lily Tomlin and Bruce Dern. "A red 'Star Wars,' "Crowdus, *Cineaste*. (U.S.-Italian, 1976, 240 min., Black and White)

1954

Sequel to Bertolucci's classic, *1900*, this film achieves the impossible — portraying a vibrant, vigorous and engaging view of the last five years of the Eisenhower presidency. This period is seen through the eyes of two Italian immigrants: Alfredo Berlingheri, now U.S. Ambassador to Italy, and Olmo Dalco, head of the longshoremen's union in New York. Constantly in struggle over government export quotas, the ambassador's union-busting and red-baiting activities and Dalco's eventual deportation, the film comes to a grim climax when Berlingheri is crushed by a forklift on the New York docks. Robert DeNiro, Al Pacino, John Belushi and Bruce Dern star in the Martin Scorsese production. (U.S., 245 min., Color)

BLENDING WITH OLD IDEAS

Revised edition of *Breaking With Old Ideas*, the 1975 Chinese film about the battle in a rural working-class college labor of "expert and red" is transformed to present day Russia. *Blending* pits Prof. Markup (Gene Hackman), a veteran linguistics teacher, against brilliant student leader Yuri Enuf (Bruce Dern), when the student starts a campaign to force KGB recruiters off campus. Markup wins Yuri over in a brilliantly filmed scenario, as he uses a Waring Blender to analogize "old and new" ideas to the thunderous applause of his students. "Brilliant," Klonsky, *The Call*. "Propaganda," Hall, *Daily World*. (China, 1976, 88½ min., Sepiatone)



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THE ANTI-NUKE MOVEMENT, 1979
A Photo Essay

Ellen Shub

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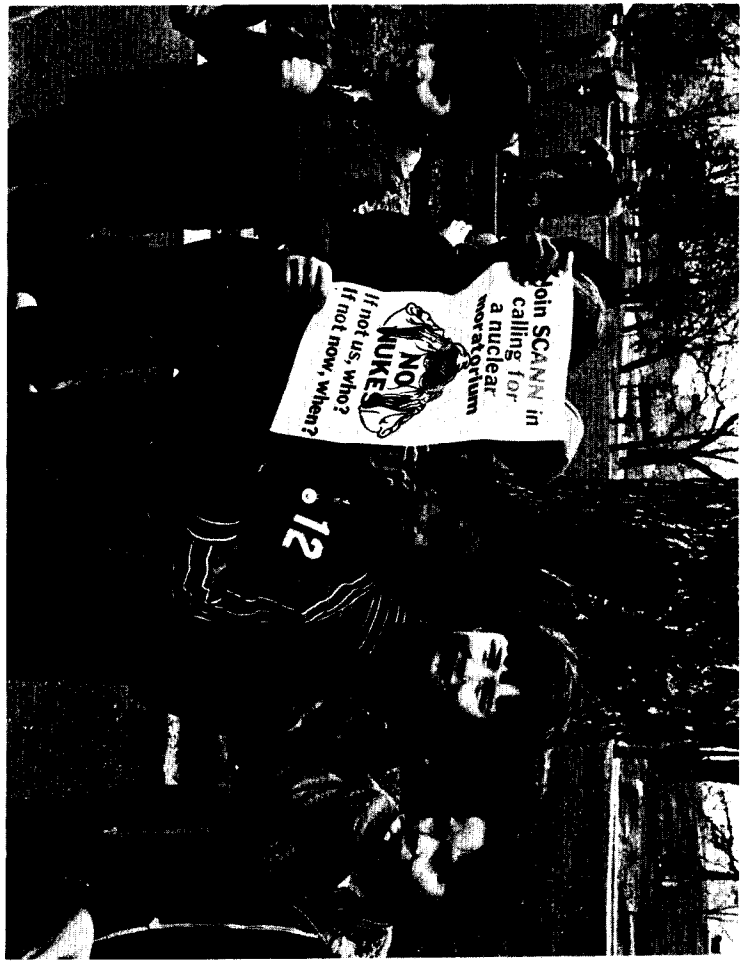

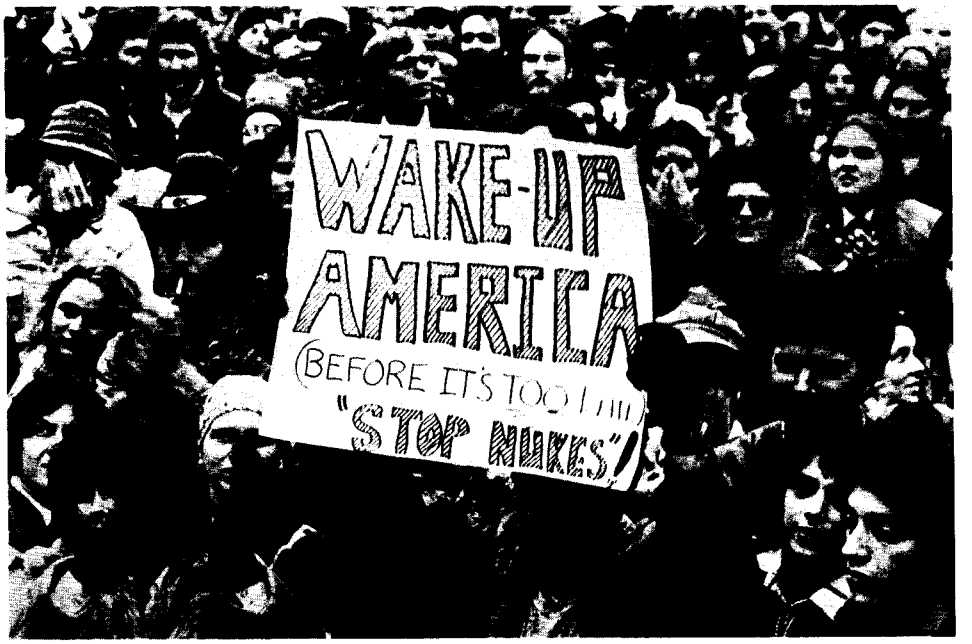
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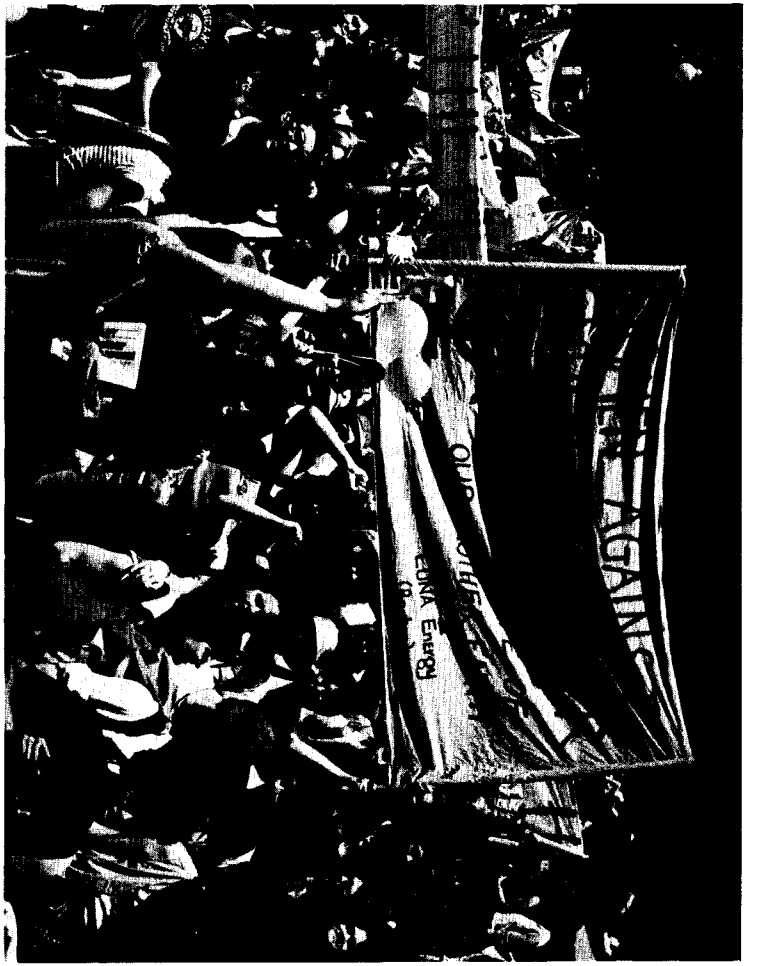

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Struggle

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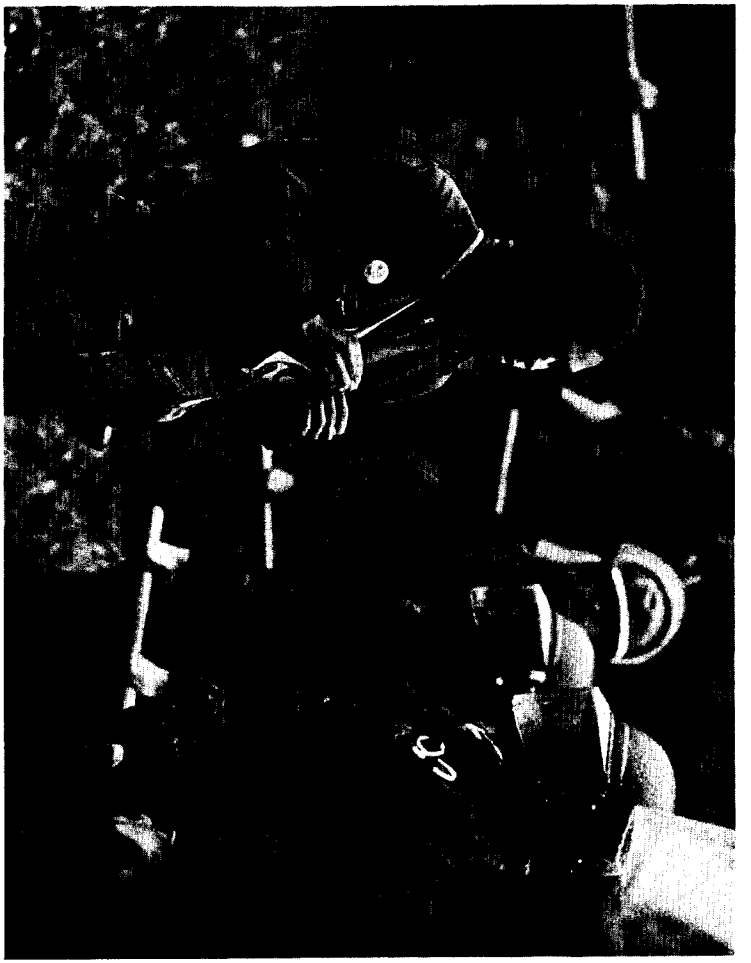
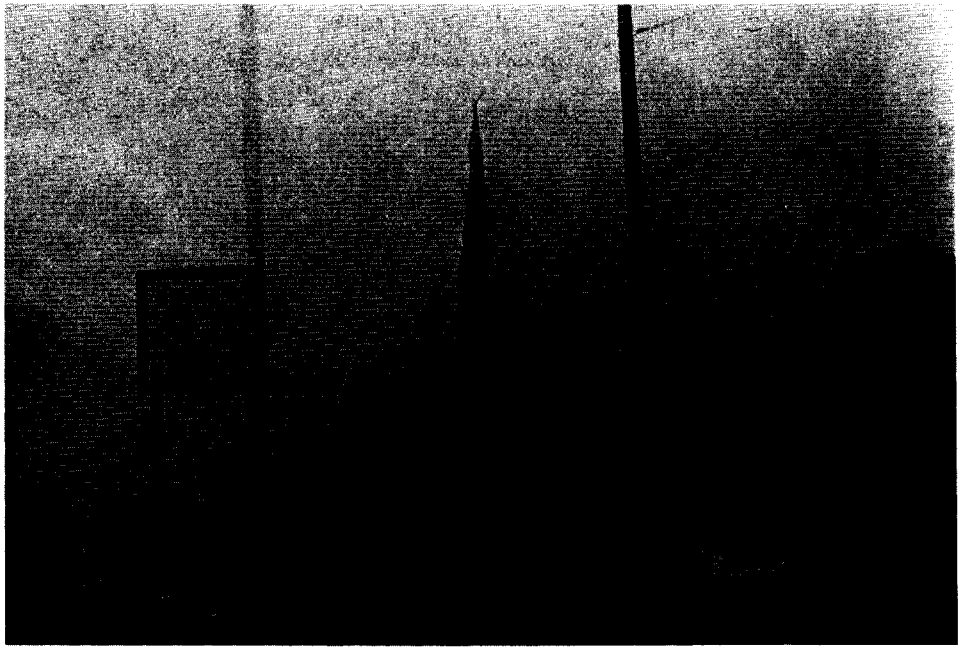


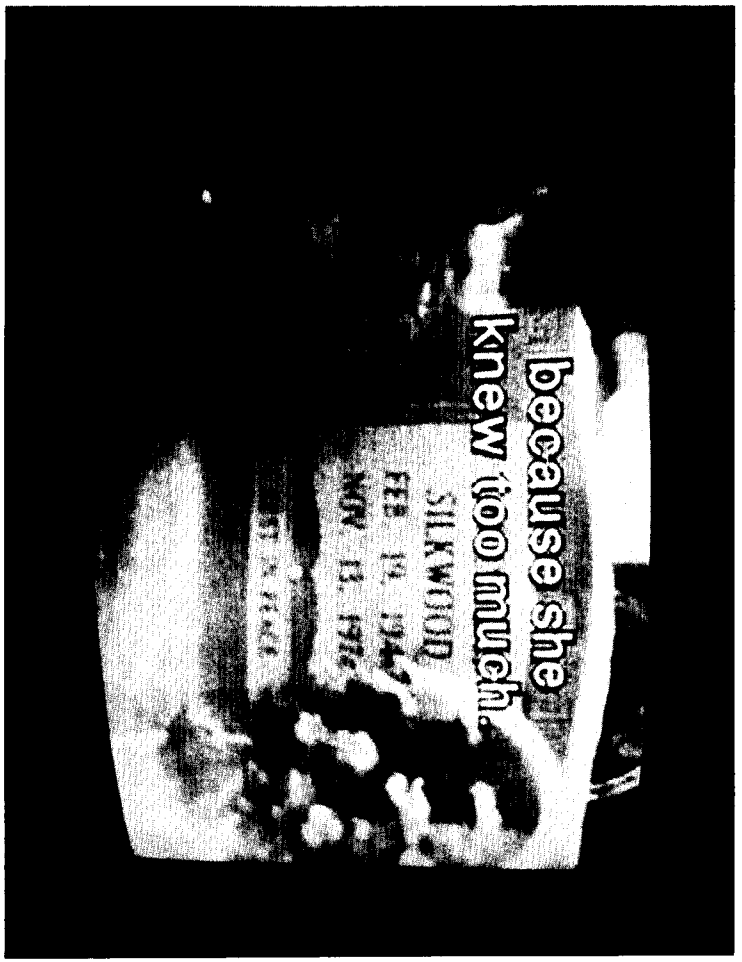
Water cannon

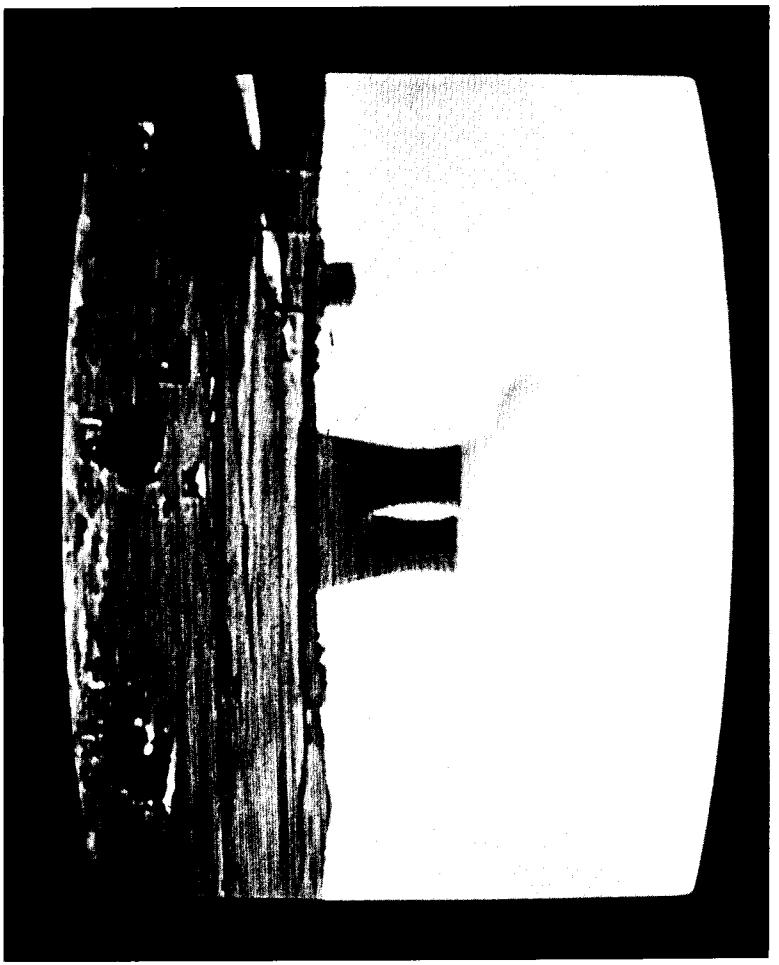
Mace



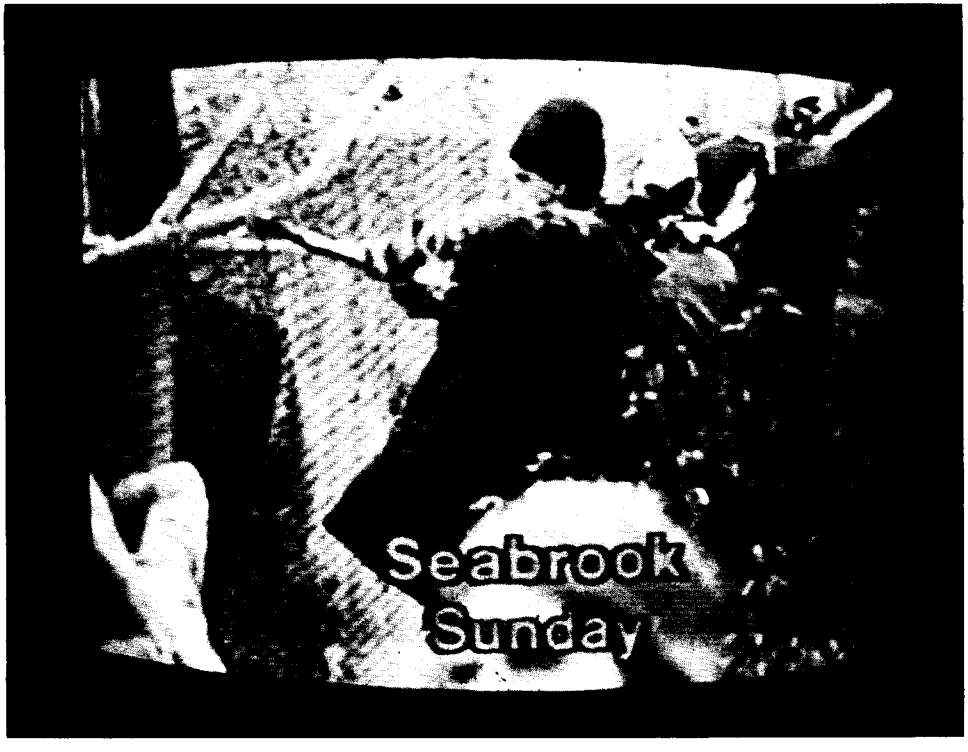
Tear Gas

IN YOUR LIVING ROOM





Wall Street occupation — October, 1979.



THE 1956 GENERATION
An Alternative Approach to the History of American Communism

Maurice Isserman

What's it like in America these days? . . . *Is it possible to have a small circle of friends, friends of grace and purpose, not incestuously, but on a basis of mutual respect, work and a kind of informal dignity, in the United States? . . . It just struck me that this is what really makes me happy, to have that circle of friends. I've grown sufficiently old, now, to know that it is a very hard thing to achieve and we find it mainly through luck. But there are times, it seems to me, in any country, any nation, when circumstances are such that it is easier or harder. On the Left, in 1956, it is hard. — Clancy Sigal,* Going Away.

From all accounts, it *was* hard to be on the Left in America in 1956. The unnamed protagonist of Clancy Sigal's autobiographical novel *Going Away* drives from Los Angeles to New York in November of that year, checking in on old friends and comrades along the way, his trip punctuated by reports on the car radio about fighting in Budapest between Hungarian workers and Russian soldiers. Sigal's protagonist was not himself a Communist, but had spent a dozen or so years on the fringes of the Communist-influenced Left. Now he finds former political associates across the country in various stages of despair and disillusionment. At journey's end he concludes that the bitterest legacy of the collapse of the Stalinist Left "consisted not of corrupting a vision of life but of failing to understand." *Going Away* is a collective portrait of a generation on the Left. Most of the characters that Sigal's *alter ego* encounters along the way (including thinly-disguised portrayals of well-known Communists like Alvah Bessie, Saul Wellman, and Joseph Starobin) had joined the Communist movement in the early 1930s. They believed when they joined, and for many

Opposite: Pete Seeger sings at American Youth Congress, 1940. Photo by Arthur Rothstein.

years thereafter, that the Soviet Union represented both the fulfillment of the socialist dream and the most reliable opponent of the military and political threat of fascism. Their faith in the Soviet cause was cemented by the Red Army's bitter resistance to the Nazi invaders in World War II: Stalingrad removed whatever private doubts they may have succumbed to during the preceding years of the Moscow Trials and the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The political isolation and persecution that the Communists suffered in the first decade of the Cold War hardened their resolve not to offer aid and comfort to the domestic "class enemy" by lending any credence to reports of terror and repression leaking out of the Soviet Union and the new People's Democracies in Eastern Europe.

Then in 1956 the combination of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, the posthumous rehabilitation of some of the victims of the postwar purge trials in Eastern Europe, and the suppression of the Hungarian rebellion by Soviet tanks stunned western Communists. The most devastating consequences were felt in the small American CP. In the hysterical anti-Communist political climate prevailing in the Truman and McCarthy years the Communists had been unable to attract new young recruits. By 1956 most American CP cadres were in their 40s, veterans of two to three decades in the movement. During all those years they had regarded the cause of socialism in America and its survival in the Soviet Union as indivisible: "Defend the Soviet Union" was the one slogan remaining constant throughout all the turns in the Party's line. But in 1956 it suddenly seemed to many Communists as though they had devoted their lives to a lie. Along about mid-way in *Going Away* Sigal has his protagonist stop in Cleveland and call up a woman Communist he had known from a union-organizing drive in North Carolina years before:

Almost the first thing she said was, "Have you been listening to the radio? We worked, we turned mimeo machines, we argued and passed resolutions and made enemies out of friends, and look what we got for our pains; tell me what good it did."

She was not the only Communist to demand an answer to that question that year: A full three quarters of the American Communist Party membership, people who had stayed with the movement in the worst years of McCarthyism, quit in the year or so after the events of 1956.[1]

In the past decade many veterans of the political movements of the 1960s have begun to reexamine the history of the American Communist Party. Though little more than a half decade separated the collapse of the CP as the hegemonic force on the left from the writing of the Port Huron statement, most New Leftists (including many children of ex-Communists) initially ignored or dismissed as irrelevant the CP's bitter and complicated history. But the collapse of the apocalyptic expectations of the late 1960s created a hunger among this new generation of left-wing activists for a tradition that could serve both as a source of political reference and inspiration in what suddenly looked like it was going to be a long struggle. The publication of the memoirs of such former Communists as George Charney, Al Richmond, Peggy Dennis, Harry Haywood and Hosea Hudson (as well as broader historical treatments written by Joseph Starobin and Max Gordon) provided a link to a heretofore little known past.[2] Approached with the right questions in mind, this history can yield a rich lode of experience and insight. Aproached with the wrong questions, it can lead to sterile imitation and political frustration.

The ranks of historians of American Communism have been drawn from a political spectrum ranging from the tamest wing of social democracy to the outermost regions of Leninist

purism. But, right or left, they have displayed a curious convergence in their approach to the CP's history. Those examining this history from the CP's right, like Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, have insisted that no real political change or evolution was possible within the Communist movement. The CP's "totalitarian" character and its subordination to Soviet directives meant that individual Party members had only a single genuine political choice available to them — to stay in the movement or break with it completely. Stalinism, Howe and Coser argued in their influential history of the CP, turned the Party's cadres into "malleable objects": the true Stalinist was an individual reduced to "little more than a series of predictable and rigidly stereotyped responses: his [sic] personality became a function of his 'belonging.' "[3]

Though ostensibly rejecting the totalitarian model, most writers who explore the history of the CP from its left flank have wound up offering equally static interpretations. They start from one or another abstract model of how the Communist Party *should* have conducted itself in the 1930s, pick and choose from among those brief moments when the CP's actual practice conformed to their model, and then dismiss the rest as either a sectarian or an opportunist falling away from the true path. Some prefer the CP's ultramilitant phase of the early 1930s; others lean toward the coalitionist politics of the latter part of the decade; still others favor 1934-1935, the brief transitional period between Third Period leftism and Popular Front rightism. This approach obscures the fact that, by and large, the same group of people shared responsibility for implementing both the approved and the scorned policies. By default it leaves the explanation for the willingness of CP members to go along with such dramatic shifts in the Party line to Howe's and Coser's "malleable objects" theory.[4]

Both right and left interpretations represent a failure of historical imagination. They treat the people who joined the CP in the 1930s as the passive agents of a politics imposed on them from above and without. They seem unwilling or unable to see American Communists as real human beings who held and discarded illusions, learned some lessons from their mistakes and failed to learn others, interpreted events as either substantiation or refutation of passionately held beliefs — in short, as a group of people involved in, shaping, and shaped by an historical process.

It is past time to abandon right and left behaviorist interpretations which portray the CP as a single-celled organism responding blindly to external stimuli (orders from Moscow in the right version, the Party's leadership's devotion or lack of devotion to revolutionary principle in the left version). The Communist Party was, undeniably, an authoritarian organization which valued its members' discipline as the most potent weapon in its political arsenal. Like Brecht's faceless young comrade in *The Measures Taken*, American Communists in the 1930s accepted the myth that the collective wisdom of the Party was necessarily greater than their own individual wisdom. They proved themselves all too willing to suspend their own judgement when it conflicted with official pronouncements, believing that their willingness to advocate publicly policies they privately felt were misguided or even repugnant amounted to the true test of their commitment as revolutionaries.

But as enthusiastically as they participated in the myth of the iron-willed and selfless Bolshevik agitator, most Communists were unable to take that step outside their own history. Their character and outlook was certainly shaped by involvement in the Communist movement, as Howe and Coser argued; at the same time, although in more subtle ways, they shaped the

Party to fit their own needs and expectations. George Charney, in his autobiography *A Long Journey*, recounted how as a young Communist in New York City in 1934 he began to feel a vague sense of dissatisfaction with the extravagant leftism of the CP's Third Period line. Acting on his own initiative he ventured to drop the then-current slogan "For a Soviet America" from the bottom of a leaflet meant to be handed out to railroad yard workers. When called on the carpet by Party superiors for this heresy, he immediately recanted. A year later the CP began carrying out the Popular Front politices decided on in Moscow by the Communist International's Seventh World Congress and the slogan "For a Soviet America" disappeared, never to resurface. Charney concluded:

The very speed with which we adapted ourselves to the new line and discarded the old shibboleths . . . was an indication not so much of our mercurial temper as the fact that it reflected what many of us really believed but could not articulate. We were prepared to live, even sluggishly, with the old policies, if that was the will of the party. But we were so much happier to live with a policy that was natural, that heeded reality, and that could unleash our creative talents and energies.[5]

In the 1930s Charney and other young Communists thought of themselves as being soldiers of the Comintern: they would have been horrified at the suggestion that in their day-to-day political activities they were reshaping the intent and effect of policies decided upon by their superiors. Nevertheless they managed to find enough ambiguity in slogans like "united front from below" to allow them to begin working in effective coalition with young socialists several years before the *Daily Worker* stopped referring to Norman Thomas as a "social fascist."[6]

As an alternative to the pick and choose approach to the CP's history, it may prove more useful to think of the history of the CP from about 1930 through 1956 as a whole, and as the history of a single generation. A generational approach to the CP's history permits an assessment of the long-term constraints under which the Communists operated, as well as the shortcomings of their policies at any given moment; it allows us to appreciate the Communists' achievements in those years without forcing us to apologize for the less attractive things they believed in and did.

What happened in the 1930s — what made the decade such a fruitful one for the CP — was that a new generation of Communists entering the Party after the collapse of the economy repeatedly pushed outward at the boundaries of political orthodoxy. They did not do so with a conscious sense of mission or strategy to reform Party policies — indeed, they were initially attracted to the CP rather than one of the other available left groups because of its public aura of resolute self-confidence, reinforced as it was by ties with the original and only successful socialist revolution. But immersed in mass movements like the unemployed councils, the campus antiwar movement, and the trade union movement, they instinctively began to "Americanize" their message and, like Charney, abandoned or downplayed the more sectarian aspects of the CP's line when they could. Older Party leaders, schooled in the international factional battles of the 1920s and out of touch with any non-Party constituency, were often more concerned with how a leaflet or pamphlet would sound when read by a supervisory committee of the Communist International in Moscow than how it would go over with its intended American readers. Younger Communists, scrambling for position and influence in the American Youth Congress or the United Auto Workers, developed different priorities.

Party leader Earl Browder's slogan of the

A meeting of International Labor Defense, initiated by the Communist Party in the 1930s to support the Scotsboro Boys and promote black-white unity.

late 1930s, "Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism," has not fared well in the accounts of most historians. They have dismissed it as the low point in the Party's attempt to adulterate its politics in an unprincipled, and unsuccessful, bid for respectability.[7] Such accusations miss an important part of the story: the genuine enthusiasm with which younger Communists greeted the slogan and made it their own. Until the mid-1930s, foreign-born veterans of the previous decade held most of the secondary leadership positions within the Party and the organizations it influenced. After 1935, and for the next twenty years, these positions were filled by those who had entered the Party in the first years of the Depression. A majority of those who joined then and stuck with the movement were the children of Jewish immigrants. Like every second generation in the history of American immigration, they hungered for the full assimilation that had evaded their parents' grasp. Had they come of age in less unsettled times they might have chosen another route, but in the early 1930s it seemed for a moment as if an American version of the October Revolution offered the quickest and surest path from marginality to influence and integration. Family ties to Russian socialist and *Bundist* traditions also influenced their decision, but rather than join the Socialist

Party, which seemed unable to break out of a needle trades constituency/ghetto, they preferred the Communists, who claimed and sometimes could demonstrate support in the American industrial heartland. Becoming Communists brought them into an organization in which (in numbers admittedly unrepresentative of the country as a whole) they could meet and work with Connecticut Yankees, Georgia and Harlem Blacks, Northwestern Finns and Midwestern Poles. For these second-generation Jewish Americans the Party served as a bridge between the Russian origins and socialist beliefs of their parents, and the "progressive" borderlands of New Deal America. It was not by chance that in choosing a Party name (a conspiratorial touch left over from Russian revolutionary tradition) so many young Jewish Communists chose the most common Anglo-Saxon names they could think of: thus Saul Regenstreif became Johnny Gates, Joseph Cohen became Joe Clark, and Abraham Richman became Al Richmond. One need not accept all the political choices the Communists made under the banner of "Twentieth Century Americanism" to understand why they were so strongly attracted to it.[8]

The signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939 brought an abrupt end to the Popular Front. Many Communists were privately unhappy with the CP's characterization of the conflict between Germany and the Allies as "the second imperialist war," and with the CP's break with the New Deal, but very few chose to leave the Party over these issues. Jewish Communists swallowed hard and grimly repeated the official line that there was "no lesser evil" in the conflict: English and American anti-Semitism, CP publications insisted, was every bit as vicious as the German variety.[9]

For the next decade and a half two tendencies coexisted uneasily within the Party and within individual Communists. In bad times, like the twenty-two months of Nazi-Soviet *rapprochement*, and the years of Cold War and domestic repression following World War II, the Communists clung tenaciously and myopically to the faith in the Soviet Union that had brought them into the movement years before. In good times, like the four years between the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and the final Allied defeat of Germany, the Communists worried less about remaining true to Lenin's heritage and more about adapting their political life to fit in with American conditions. It was an unsatisfactory and unstable arrangement which, as the middle 1950s approached, began to show distinct signs of wear and tear.

Congressman Vito Marcantonio, head of the American Labor Party; singer Paul Robeson; and Leo Isacson, ALP Congressman from the Bronx, at a Washington demonstration against the Mundt-Nixon bill in 1948.

The first signs of unrest and dissent showed up among the several thousand Party cadre sent underground in the early 1950s to preserve a skeleton organization in the event of the total outlawing of the CP. The ranks of the underground were reserved for the most reliable and experienced Party members — the most "malleable objects" in Howe's and Coser's model. And yet, cut off from the day-to-day

political life of the Party, with little to do but read and talk with other "unavailables," Communists in the underground soon began to question many of the unexamined assumptions about the nature of Soviet society and the appropriateness of Leninist organization and strategy to American conditions that had shaped their outlook over the preceding decades. One former Communist, an Abraham Lincoln Brigade veteran who was the CP's "unavailable but operative" district organizer for Western Pennsylvania in the early 1950s, shocked his above-ground Party liaison when he expressed sympathy with the East German workers who were fighting street battles with Soviet tanks in 1953; that same year he remembers crying when he heard the news of Stalin's death.[10]

However hesitant the Communists were to break with earlier beliefs, the significance of these first criticisms should not be slighted. American Communists had not lost the capacity to learn from their political experiences: they had simply lacked the institutional means within the Party to develop and act on the lessons that were there to be learned.

The events of 1956 lent impetus to this internal reexamination, but also undermined it. When Red Army tanks rolled into Budapest they forced the question of future relations with the Soviet Union to the center of Party debate. Of all the issues facing the Communists, this was the one offering the least possibility for compromise, and most reform-minded Communists decided that the prize — control of a decimated and isolated CP — was not worth the struggle. In the months that followed they voted with their feet. Despite revelations about Soviet anti-Semitism that accompanied the 1956 crisis (including the murder in the last years of Stalin's life of many of the most prominent Yiddish writers and artists), the older generation of foreign-born Jewish Communists in the United States tended to stick with the Party: the exodus from the Party was centered in the younger generation of non-Yiddish speaking, native-born Jewish Communists.[11]

May Day demonstration in New York, 1950.

Those who left the CP in 1956-1958 did so because they had taken the political slogans of the Popular Front years seriously, and had finally decided that an "Americanized" American Communism was not in the cards. What began as a series of tactical disagreements with William Z. Foster's hardline approach to political, union, and legal-defense questions in the late 1940s and early 1950s was transformed by the events of 1956 into a debate over fundamentals. The dissenters could no longer accept the Soviet model of socialism, and concluded that American socialism should be built on the foundation of the country's democratic traditions and institutions and not, as they had earlier assumed, on the ruins of "bourgeois democracy." In an article in *Political Affairs* in the fall of 1956, *Daily Worker* editor Johnny Gates argued that the "great lesson" that had to be learned from the revelations of the Soviet Twentieth Congress was that "the expansion of democracy is not automatic under socialism but must be fought for."[12]

The dissenters were united by a commitment to democratic political forms, both within the Party organization and as a basic component of their vision of socialist society. They were not united by much else. They could not agree on any common strategy for rebuilding the Left, let alone for proceeding to the transition to socialism. Unlike E.P. Thompson, Doris Lessing, and some of the other British Communists who broke with the Party in that period, most American Communists displayed little interest or insight into the questions of cultural and sexual politics that would soon be raised by the New Left. Those who quit the CP in the aftermath of the Khrushchev speech had traveled a long way between 1930 and 1956: they did not have all the right answers, nor had they even thought of all the right questions by the time they reached the end of that road. There are no timeless political blueprints hidden in the history of the American Communist Party.

What the history of the CP can offer to the Left today is a sense of historical perspective. As William Appleman Williams argued in the introduction to *The Contours of American History*:

Only by grasping what we were is it possible to see how we changed, to understand the process and the nature of the modifications, and to gain some perspective on what we are. The historical experience is not one of staying in the present and looking back. Rather it is one of going back into the past and returning to the present with a wider and more intense consciousness of the restraints of our former outlook.[13]

The Communists prided themselves on their ability to take "the long view," yet it was only at the end of decades of political activity that they were able to subject their own history and assumptions to this sort of detached scrutiny.

NOTES

1. For the impact of the events of 1956 on the American Communist Party see the Columbia University Russian Institute's documentary collection *The Anti-Stalin Campaign and International Communism* (New York: 1956); David Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism* (New York: 1959), pp. 272-353; Joseph Starobin, "1956, A Memoir," *Problems of Communism*, XV (November-December 1966); and Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957* (Berkeley: 1972), pp. 3-19, 224-237. Clancy Sigal's novel *Going Away, A Report, A Memoir* (Boston: 1962) is one of the few fictional treatments of the American Left that does not degenerate into melodrama or diatribe. Its intelligence and good humor compare quite favorably to efforts by better known writers like John Steinbeck's sentimental *In Dubious Battle* or Norman Mailer's turgid *Barbary Shore*.

2. George Charney, *A Long Journey* (Chicago: 1968); Al Richmond, *A Long View From the Left, Memoirs of an American Revolutionary* (New York: 1972); Peggy Dennis, *The Autobiography of an American Communist* (Westport, CT: 1978); Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik, Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago: 1978); Nell Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson, His Life as a Negro Communist in the South* (Cambridge: 1979); Max Gordon, "The Communist Party of the Nineteen-thirties and the New Left," *Socialist Revolution*, VI (January-March 1976), pp. 11-66; Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957*.

3. Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party, A Critical History, 1919-1957* (Boston: 1957), pp. 506, 519.

4. Over the years *Radical America* has provided a forum for a variety of different interpretations of the history of the CP. James Green, in his article "Working Class Militancy in the Depression," *Radical America*, VI (November-December 1972), pp. 1-35, defends the CP's trade union policies in the early 1930s against charges of sectarianism, and sees CP policies after 1935 descending into a morass of bureaucracy and opportunism. Staughton Lynd, in his 1974 article "The United Front in America: A Note," *Radical America*, VIII (July-August 1974), pp. 29-37, describes the CP's post-Third Period but pre-Popular Front policies of 1934-1935 as a "promising beginning" in the development of a mass radical movement that all too soon would give way to "an amorphous coalition of so-called progressive

forces." For a recent article that avoids the pitfalls of the pick and choose approach, see Mark Naison's "Lefties and Righties: The Communist Party and Sports During the Great Depression," *Radical America*, XIII (July-August 1979), pp. 47-59.

5. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

6. Hal Draper, a socialist student leader in the 1930s, later wrote that the CP's National Student League was "one of the most successful of the Communist-led movements of the thirties; and it was also one of the most competently led. Among its top leaders were Joseph Starobin, Joseph Cohen (Joseph Clark), James Wechsler — all of New York — and, from the West Coast Serril Gerber and Celeste Strack. In general, they were more imaginative and less muscle-bound in style than the cliche-ridden hacks who presided over other Communist Party enterprises in the earlier years. In a real sense the NSL pioneered the Popular Front pattern." Draper, "The Student Movement of the Thirties," in Rita James Simon, ed., *As We Saw the Thirties* (Urbana, Ill.: 1967), p. 153.

7. See, for example, Howe and Coser, *op. cit.*, pp. 339-341, and James Weinstein, *Ambiguous Legacy* (New York: 1975), pp. 77-86.

8. The exact percentage of Jewish membership in the American Communist Party in the 1930s is hard to determine. Nathan Glazer devotes three pages of footnotes in *The Social Basis of American Communism* (New York: 1961), pp. 220-222 to a review of the fragmentary evidence on the question, and then fails to offer an estimate of the percentage of Jewish membership. Glazer does point out that the New York County membership (accounting for about one-fifth of the total CP membership in 1948) was largely Jewish in background. Other centers of Communist strength like Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Chicago also had high percentages of Jewish membership. A recent sociological study of the CP's Central Committee between 1921 and 1961 showed that one third of its members were Jewish, but that it took longer for Jews to attain membership on the Central Committee than non-Jews (which suggests, as does more impressionistic evidence, that the CP deliberately held down the number of Jews reaching top leadership positions in order to present a more ethnically diverse public appearance). See Harvey Klehr, "Female Leadership in the Communist Party of the United States of America," *Studies in Comparative Communism*, X (Winter 1977), p. 398.

9. For the CP leadership's complaints about "a certain hesitancy and moments of vacillation" displayed by Communists in New York and elsewhere when it came to breaking with Roosevelt in the fall of 1939, see *The Communist*, XIX (May 1940), pp. 407, 411. For the "no lesser evil" argument and anti-Semitism, see Earl Browder, *The Jewish People and the War* (New York: 1940), *passim*, and *Jewish Voice*, I (March-April 1941), p. 2. (The *Jewish Voice*, an internal Party publication for Jewish Communists, can be found in the Tamiment Institute archives.)

10. Interview with the author, January 1978. Also see Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis*, p. 223; Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

11. Glazer, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

12. *Political Affairs*, XXXV (November 1956), pp. 43-56.

13. For the British CP in 1956 see John Saville, "The Twentieth Congress and the British Communist Party," inSaville and Ralph Milliband, eds., *The Socialist Register, 1976* (London: 1976). After their departure from the CP, Thompson, Lessing, and other British CP dissenters started a journal called *The New Reasoner* which later became *New Left Review*. *The New Reasoner* still bears re-reading today. See especially, E.P. Thompson, "Socialist Humanism, An Epistle to the Philistines," *New Reasoner*, I (Summer 1957), pp. 105-143 and Doris Lessing, "The Day that Stalin Died," *New Reasoner*, I (Autumn 1957), pp. 30-39.

14. William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (Cleveland: 1961), p. 19.

MAURICE ISSERMAN is an itinerant college teacher who recently wrote a dissertation on American Communism during World War II.

POETRY

Richard Waring

Walt Whitman

WHAT HAS AMERICA DONE WITH YOU, WALT WHITMAN?

I desire to be with you, Walt Whitman,
when the elm leaves break in spring on Boston Common,
when crossing or not crossing roads is all we do all day,
when a queer encounter makes you whisper excited and joyful in my ear,
when with song and story you share yourself at my table in exchange for bread.

I desire to be with you
to know that love cannot keep two people captive or apart,
to know bearded lips on my chest and steady company,
to know the anguish of being forever a mystery,
content in this song of desire for you.

II

I have wondered, Walt, who listened to you,
lingering awhile beneath "No Loitering" signs in Manhattan.
I have walked fish-shaped Long Island, back and forth,
in search of you, and no arm-linked vision have I seen.
What remote village are you nursing in, where cast your kindness now,

while transnationals cruise slowly toward disaster?
Walt Whitman! the ship you launched has lost all bearing,
its compass is berserk, each direction's a fresh disappointment,
and plutonium triggers lurk in the cargo!
Walt Whitman! I hear America singing in death notes!

III

What has America done, Walt, with you now?
Is there a president to praise?
Are we all free to love?
Will the real Walt Whitman ever stand up in public school?
Why are shopping malls and banks named after you and not open parks?

What are you thinking of as you watch the money hands of ad men play over the naked beauty of women?
Don't you care that you're being cried over?
I'm angry with all your secrecy.
I wait, desiring, for you in a supermarket aisle,
and the notes to a melody I once knew.

COUP DE L'ARBRE

Red revolt,
A crowd of acorns
Is beheaded.

Resenting this,

The total populace
Of leaves
Defects to earth.

COFFEE BREAK

I'm having a gay time
here at Relief Printing Co.
apparently typesetting business cards
for the sad society of capitalism.

But what gleams for me,
moments after my supervisor's gone,
are the poems I write —
hundreds in the mechanical purr —

driving proofreaders to hysterics.
What if businessmen passed out
poems instead of business cards?
Would stock be driven

to its knees or else
capitalism itself get nervous
in all its ties and suits,
falling into thistles, writhing and naked?

THE SNOWMAN

He is no ordinary
citizen, born of muscles alone,
no genes, no appetites, no home.
He leads a more tenuous existence

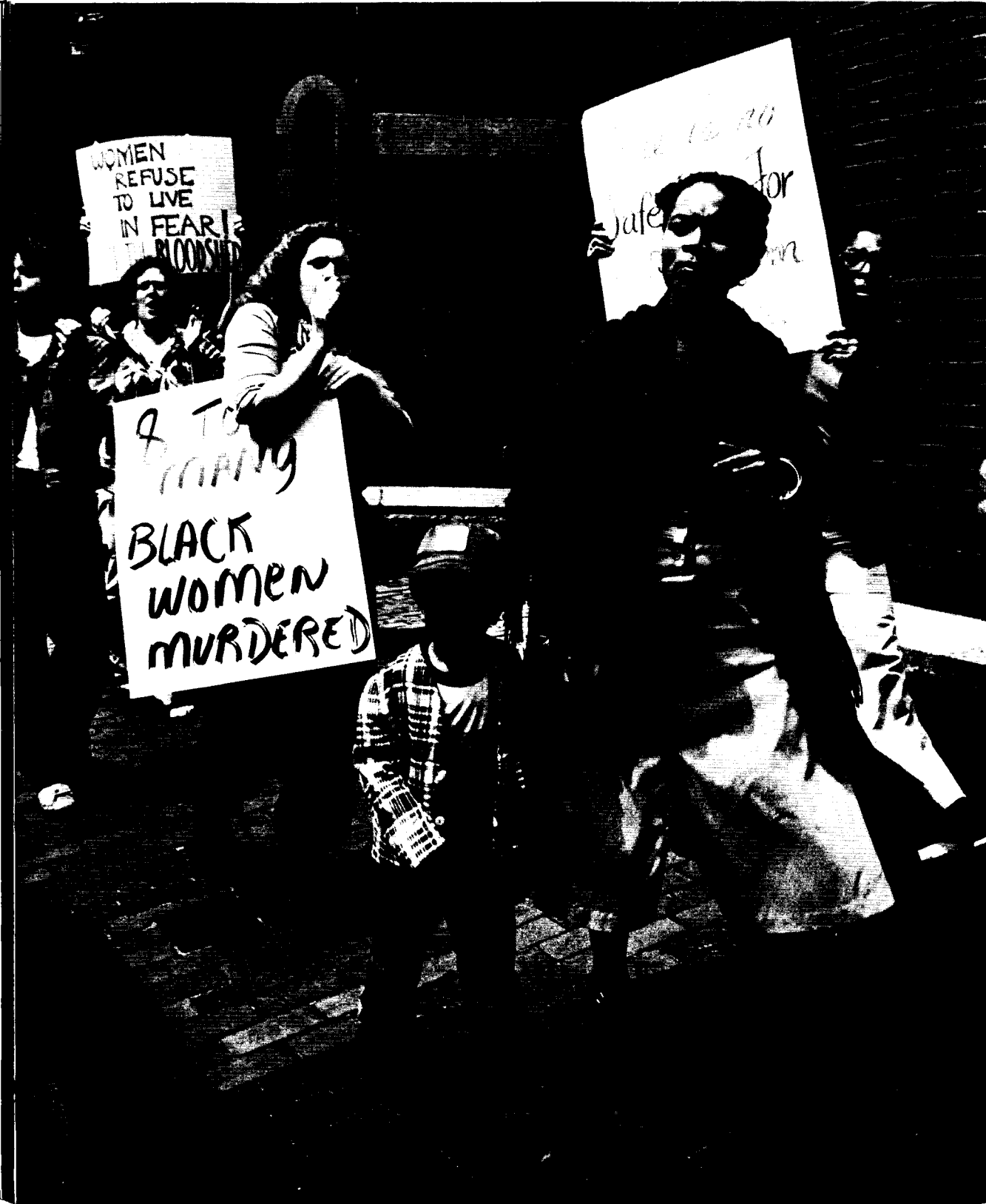
than most, each day a battle
against odds, each night a chance
to regain strength.
Nothing can smooth the scars

of abandon; he's no sooner
created than orphaned, without
chance for government support, heart
surgery, social security in times

that will never come. Sun struck,
his heart lapses; reclining
into an anemic slump, his head
dizzied and half gone, he falters,

uncertain of night's recovery, then
with a boxer's dignity, lets go his
head, lets go one side of his belly,
lets go
altogether.

RICHARD WARING lives in Mission Hill, a multi-ethnic neighborhood of Boston, and edits a yet-to-be-released review, *Poetry &*, which will explore "radical forms of coherence."


WOMEN
REFUSE
TO LIVE
IN FEAR!
BLACK
WOMEN
MURDERED

BLACK MACHO & BLACK FEMINISM

Linda Powell

A Review of *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* by Michele Wallace (Dial Press, 1979).

Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* never recovers from our expectations of it. No single volume could withstand the hype and controversy that has surrounded this one. This particular book, however, which doesn't say enough about anything, certainly can't.

"Black Macho" and "The Myth of the Superwoman" are two separate essays which examine specific ideas about black women, black men and their relationships. Wallace's work proceeds from the premise that:

. . . there is a profound distrust, if not hatred, between black men and black women that has been nursed along largely by white racism but also by an almost deliberate ignorance on the part of blacks about the sexual politics of their experience in this country.

"Black Macho" traces the development of patterns of interaction between black men and women from slavery through the present. Wallace contrasts "patriarchal macho" — as exemplified by the family and community-rooted Malcolm X, against "Narcissistic Macho" — the Man of the Black Power Movement who sought only his "manhood."

"The Myth of the Superwoman" attacks certain contradictory beliefs about the black woman and her needs. Wallace uses historic examples of black women involved in their communities to show how the strong, invulnerable "superwoman" image has prevented a real assessment of the status of black women. She pays special attention to the resistance of some black women to the Women's Movement and calls upon the black woman to develop an analysis and assert an identity.

Opposite: Demonstration against the Boston murders, April, 1979. Photo by Ellen Shub.

In the process, we learn a great deal about Michele Wallace, the woman. She was born in 1952 and grew up on Sugar Hill, Harlem, New York City. Her mother was an artist and teacher and Wallace describes herself as middle-class. She attended New Lincoln, an integrated private school "located on the very boundary of the ghetto," where she mingled with "a hodgepodge of performers', intellectuals', and ordinary capitalists' children." A serious case of eczema which lasted through her early adolescence negatively affected her self-image. When the Civil Rights Movement shifted gears into the Black Power Movement, Wallace was 16 years old and:

...blackness came to Harlem. In lofts, theatres, apartments, the streets, any available space — black artists, musicians, writers, poets, many of them fresh from the East Village, began to gather in response to the cries of "Black Power" and "kill whitey" that had echoed in the streets during the recent riots. They were the cultural wing come to entertain, to guide, to stimulate the troops of black rebels.

During this period, for somewhat obscure reasons, Wallace's mother chose to place her in a Catholic shelter for runaway girls.

...since it was obvious that her attempt to protect me was going to prove a failure, she was determined to make me realize that as a black girl in white America I was going to find it an uphill climb to keep myself together. I did not have a solid and powerful middle-class establishment to rebel against — only an establishment of poverty and oppression thinly veiled by a few trips to Europe, a private school education, and some clothes from Bonwit Teller. She wanted to compel me to think for myself because she knew, whatever else she didn't know, that I would never be able to survive if I didn't.

This five-week stay proved crucial for Wallace, and she says:

In the girls I met at the Residence I could see generation after generation stretched out into infinity of hungry, brutalized, illiterate children. Born of children. Black women have never listened to their mothers. No black woman ever pays much attention to any other black woman. And so each one starts out fresh, as if no black woman had ever tried to live before. The Black Movement was unable to provide me with the language I needed to discuss these matters, I had no alternative but to become a feminist.

And this declaration is the book's foremost problem. Feminism is a political ideology, an analysis of the role of sexism in human society and a plan for change. It is a formed, viable entity, backed by an international movement of women. Choosing to feature this label through the book bought Wallace some of the support and validation of that movement, as well as some measure of notoriety as the "*black* feminist." At the same time, she created expectations, of clarity, vision and judgment, that she simply doesn't meet.

The reader is especially confused by Wallace's view of the 60's. Her analysis of that era is characterized by a focus on the psychosexual dynamics of the time and a general romanticism about how societal change happens.

To most of us Black Power meant wooly heads, big black fists and stern black faces, gargantuan omnipotent black male organs, big black rifles and foot-long combat boots, tight pants over young muscular asses, dashikis, and broad brown chests; black men looting and rioting in the streets, taking over the country by brute force, arrogant lawlessness and an unquestionable sexual authority granted them as the victims of four hundred years of racism and abuse.

This kind of assertion is comparable to the Second Wave of the Women's Movement being evaluated exclusively on the bras allegedly

burned at a beauty pageant in the early seventies.

Historically, the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements were transforming for all kinds of people — black, white, male and female. These movements were the political training ground for thousands who would later be active in anti-war, anti-nuclear, women's and continuing black community organizing. It was a time of open resistance and defiance, when many of us tested the limits set by our oppression to see how far they would give. It's hard to reconcile that reality with Wallace's perceptions:

There was more to the protest and furor of the sixties and seventies than an attempt to correct the concrete problems of black people. The real key was the carrot the white man had held just beyond the black man's nose for many generations, that imaginary resolution of all the black man's woes and discontent, something called manhood. It was the pursuit of manhood *that stirred the collective imagination of the masses of blacks in this country and led them to almost turn America upside down.* [Emphasis mine.]

And when the black man went as far as the adoration of his own genitals could carry him, his revolution stopped. A big Afro, a rifle and a penis in good working order were not enough to lick the white man's world after all.

Her ideas are provocative, but Wallace is simply too willing to rewrite history to fit her own theories.

Unnecessarily, Wallace fans the flames of one of the oldest and most persistent myths among black women: the nature of interracial relationships between black men and white women. Wallace never states flat-out that these relationships are undesirable, she simply snipes at them throughout the book:

That same fall the streets of New York witnessed the grand coming out of black male/white female couples. Frankly, I found this confusing. I was enough of a slave to white liberal fashions to believe that two people who wanted each other had a right to each other, but was that what this was about?

It was the Civil Rights Movement, however, that also made it clear that a gap was developing between black men and women. Although usually grudgingly respected by men for the contribution they made to the movement's work, black women were never allowed to rise to the lofty heights of a Martin Luther King or a Roy Wilkins or even a John Lewis.... And there was yet another price the black women of the Civil Rights Movement had to pay for their competence. After hours, their men went off with white women.

Rooted in this belief that somehow men and women "belong" to each other, Wallace misses a key opportunity to restate this "dilemma" in *feminist* terms. She says:

That young, educated, upwardly mobile, politically active and aware black men were taking an interest in white women had nothing to do with whether black women or white women were more docile, compliant, or attractive... There was a misunderstanding between the black man and the black woman, a misunderstanding as old as slavery, the I.O.U. was finally being called in.... The result was a brain-shattering explosion upon the heads of black women, the accumulation of over three hundred years of rage.

A feminist analysis of this phenomenon starts from simpler notions. The political reality is that black women are often trapped by our conditioning as women — passive, "lady-like," male-identified, and dependent. We are to be "chosen." Black men, like white men, share a special kind of freedom with regard to women. Men, as a class, have the power to "choose" women that is related to our status as reactive, not proactive, partners. (Incidentally, Wallace is much better at drawing connections between

black and white women than black and white men.) Anger toward black women and blaming white women are ways to fend off the feelings of rejection, powerlessness and vulnerability that always accompany the traditional female role. In a larger sense, these relationships have significance only as long as we accept our own powerlessness and believe ourselves "unfinished" without a man.

Wallace stumbles most disappointingly on issues that have been crucial to the Women's Movement. She appears totally uncritical of the nuclear family as an institution, and is most revealing in her comments about single black women who choose to become parents. She attributes this trend to the fact that:

. . . a black woman has no legitimate way of coming together with other black women, no means of self-affirmation — in other words, no women's movement, and therefore no collective ideology. Career and success are still the social and emotional disadvantages to her that they were to white women in the fifties. There is little in the black community to reinforce a young black woman who does not have a man or a child and who wishes to pursue a career. She is still considered against nature. It is extremely difficult to assert oneself when there remains some question of one's basic identity.

These are important ideas worthy of discussion, but Wallace is exclusively expressing male-identified perspectives on them. From a woman's vantage point, there are many other reasons why a black woman without a husband might choose to be a mother: love of children, faith in the future of the black community, desire for the physical experience of pregnancy, lack of interest in relationships with men, etc. A feminist perspective affirms all of these possible choices.

Any questions about Wallace's familiarity with the more serious issues within radical feminist thought are answered by her one devastatingly bitter comment on lesbians:

Some black women have come together because they can't find husbands. Some are angry with their boyfriends. The lesbians are looking for a public forum for their sexual preference.

The basic connections between sexual preference, sex roles, and sexism are well-understood by most feminists. Wallace is obviously unfamiliar with them.

The overall tone of the book is particularly difficult to understand. We are never clear whether Wallace considers herself a part of the community she's describing. In a misplaced effort to be witty and bright, she is often condescending and coy.

A prime example is her treatment of Angela Davis as "the best known female activist in the Black Power Movement."

. . . Angela Davis became a prime mover in the committee to free the Soledad Brothers. She subsequently became friendly with George Jackson's brother Jonathan, who was seventeen, and began to correspond with George Jackson. Although she had only seen him briefly in his courtroom appearance, she fell in love with him. Such things were not uncommon in the sixties.

On August 7, 1970, Jonathan Jackson attended the trial of James McClain, a prisoner at San Quentin who was a friend of George's. At an early point during the proceedings young Jackson stood up. He had a carbine in his hand and, as in all the good movies, he ordered everyone in the courtroom to freeze. McClain, as well as Ruchell Magee and William Christmas, also prisoners at San Quentin who were present in order to testify, joined Jonathan. They left the courtroom with Judge Harold Haley, Assistant DA Gary Thomas, and several jurors, and got into a waiting van. A San Quentin guard fired on them, and a general shoot out followed, leaving three of the prisoners and Judge Haley dead, Thomas, Magee

and one of the jurors wounded. It was called a revolt.... *Angela Davis, a brilliant, middle-class black woman, with a European education, a Ph.D. in philosophy, and a university appointment, was willing to die for a poor, uneducated black male inmate.* It was straight out of Hollywood — Ingrid Bergman and Humphrey Bogart. [Emphasis mine.]

The issue raised by Wallace — whether the politics of Davis' work were as relevant as her position in "support" of black men — is important. But her manner of raising these issues somewhat diminishes our respect for her. And her characterization of Davis as "a person driven by a sense of mission — totally committed to alleviating some of the pain inflicted upon people in this world," is inconsistent with her real life as a political woman, committed to the overthrow of an inhumane social system. Her motivation is *not* charity, but justice.

This is a difficult book to review. It is not a political work; it does not confront or question basic power relations (and before I accepted that fact, this review was going to be considerably longer). This is not a formal scholarly study; there are no footnotes, few sources cited and Wallace chose not to use the interviews she had conducted. It is not simply a personal memoir; Wallace clearly goes far beyond individual experience to sweeping social commentary. This book is an ineffective mix of all of these forms; inflammatory, and suggestive without actually challenging anyone or anything. In many ways, it is a book of the 70's — ahistorical, apolitical and me-centered. It accepts — without question — too many assump-

Photo by Ellen Shub.

tions that ensnare too many people.

We still need the book that this could have been. A feminist analysis of the relationships between black men, women, and children, is desperately needed. However, this book could have been helped immeasurably had Wallace absorbed some radical feminist theory in addition to Norman Mailer, Tom Wolfe, and James Baldwin, whom she relies upon heavily. Or if she had spoken with some black feminist activists and theoreticians (who, contrary to Wallace's lack of knowledge, *do* exist).

Still, this book should be read. Traditional, male-identified, upwardly mobile black women and men may gain interesting insights into their relationships and self-images. People committed to systematic social change need to critique this book in terms of *why* it was published at *this* time and with *such* attention.

Like the controversy in the media three years ago around Ntozake Shange's Choreopoem, *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*, the response to this book shows how much the black community wants to talk about sexual politics. So much so, in fact, that in many places, people aren't talking about this book at all. They're discussing the real issues of concern to black men and women — sex roles, relationships, parenting, sexuality, building a brighter future for all of us, etc.

Unfortunately, this is the only book that many black people will read about feminism as an ideology. It is important that black feminists everywhere use the opportunity this book creates to focus on the real political issues and the importance of systemic change for *all* people. Talking to the entire black community about feminism as a strategy for change, although difficult, must continue and increase. To the extent that *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* fuels and encourages that discussion, reading it is important.

Since much of Wallace's description and analysis of the 1960s is so easily dismissed, however, public debate about it has tended toward a critique of black feminism altogether. Much of the published criticism of the book has been negative, particularly from the left. [Reviews in *In These Times, The Guardian*, and *The Black Scholar* condemned it from an anti-feminist perspective. — eds.] Magazines and newspapers seldom chose black women or feminists to review the book; they sometimes chose black men *known* to be anti-feminist for the task. Few of these writers seemed conversant with any other than the most reformist of feminist issues and analyses.

The bulk of this criticism fell into two categories. The first criticized the book in general, somewhat emotional terms. These critics proceeded from a "ranking of oppressions" which stated, without hesitation, that racism was more important than sexism and that the American media-machine was "creating" concern about sexism in the black community. These articles often ended with a humanistic call for black men and women to recognize their special relationship, and open a dialogue on the issue. The second sort of criticism started from a seemingly more sophisticated political analysis. Believing that the real enemy is monopoly capitalism, these writers diminished "subsidiary" issues, i.e. sexism, and urged an all-out attack on the larger system. The effect of both tacks is to discredit feminism as a viable political stance for black women, or at best, to imply that black feminism should be vastly different from its current practice — that it should "protect" rather than confront black men.

Some of this criticism was helpful and progressive; in other ways, however, it demonstrates how *much* the black community needs a feminist movement. Many of the assumptions underlying these reviews have political implications that cannot go unexamined. First, why

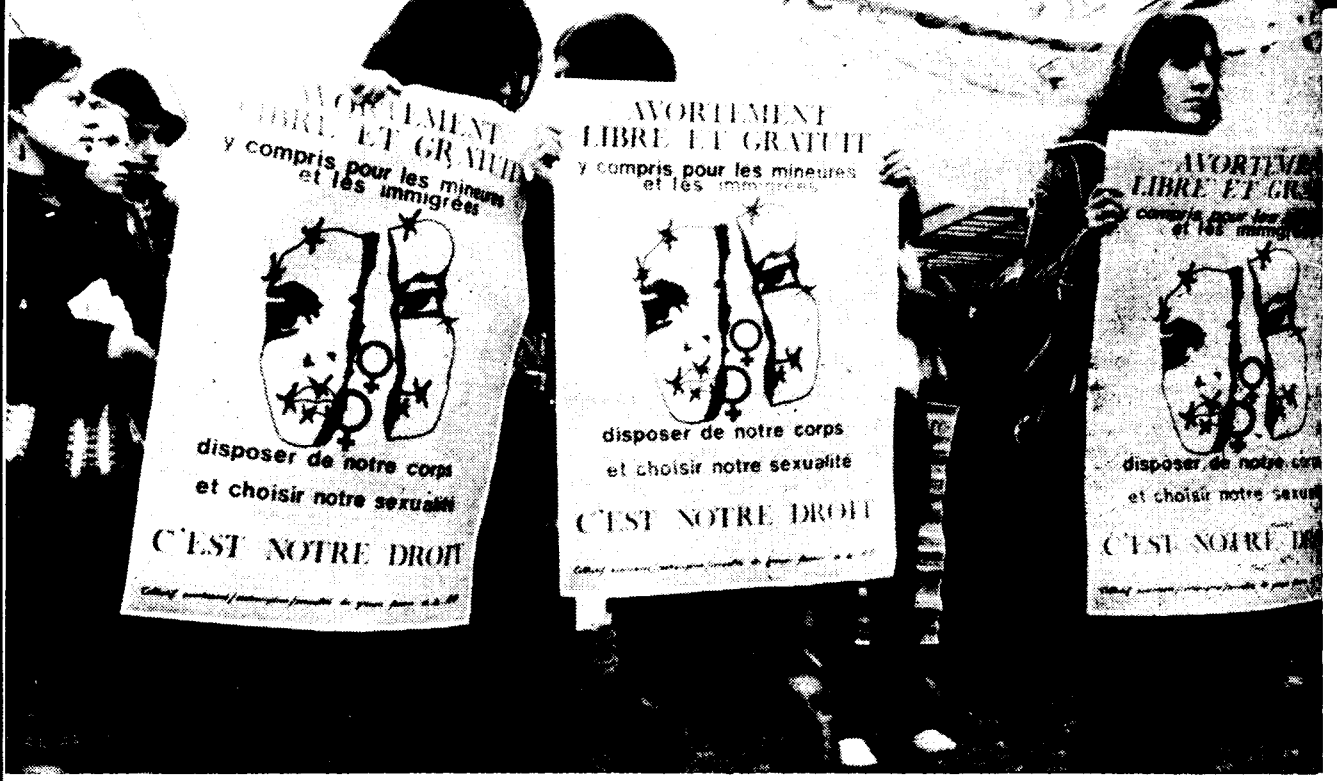
was there such a negative judgment placed on Wallace's being "angry?" We know that anger at material conditions is often the beginning of political transformation, so is it that *women* aren't supposed to get angry? Or is it that men are not prepared for the expression of that anger toward them? One of the by-products of a black feminist movement would be the creation of a climate where process is important, and criticism and anger are more firmly a part of our definition of "struggle."

Second, also interesting was the knee-jerk reaction that any pro black-woman position was automatically antiblack-male. Some of this represents our historically justified fear of being divided as a community. But some of it may also represent the first stirrings of an understanding that black male privilege *does* exist — no matter how limited, how circumscribed, or how specific. There is an arena in which black men do wield power over black women, and in some cases, have exercised this power in the service of the current social system. Our ability to face and overcome this reality depends in large degree on Black men's determination to *not be used in this way* anymore, and to struggle with other men to aid them in avoiding it.

Third, we need to question why so much of this debate has been framed, even by the most progressive of writers, in the most surface terms. The issues most commonly addressed are the relative income/education levels of black men and women and the extent to which disparities in this area affect their ability to form adult heterosexual relationships. This tendency — to see only these issues — is itself evidence of the need for a movement of black women to question some of the other aspects of their lives. Such questions, leading to a more radical feminist analysis, are going to be necessary if the black community is to work together to its full potential; questions about rape, domestic violence, sexuality, homophobia, sexual harassment, non-sexist childrearing, etc. These are not "tangential" issues to the struggle against racism. These are life/death issues for black women, against whom both racism/sexism impact disproportionately.

Ultimately, much of the debate on Wallace's book was academic. Black women *are* interested in feminism and will continue to be interested because it "speaks the unspoken" about their lives; it offers hope for desperate situations which others — white *and* black — would tell us to simply accept. It provides a *political* understanding for situations that others would dismiss as only personal. And, importantly, black feminist politics can help sweep aside overly-romanticized illusions of unity and begin to build a strong movement of men and women who can fight together for a better world.

LINDA C. POWELL is a black feminist activist in New York City. She is a singer and songwriter, and is presently working on a book-length collection of interviews with black feminists.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LETTER FROM PARIS

The French abortion law — *Loi Veil* — was passed on January 17, 1975 for a trial period of five years. Parliament began reconsidering it on November 29, 1979, and the women's movement has organized accordingly. Spearheaded by the French Movement for Family Planning (Mouvement Francais pour le Planning Familial), the women's goals are not only to defend the law against a powerful antiabortion lobby, but even to improve and strengthen the law.

A brief glance at the history: In 1974 a traditional right-wing government was replaced by a more astute, though equally conservative, government bent on coopting rather than outright repression. As a result, two women were appointed ministers: one to a much-touted Ministry for the Female Condition, the other, Simone Veil, to the Ministry of Health. Thus it was a woman who in December 1974 presented the government's bill for the legalization of abortion to largely male houses of Parliament (e.g., 271 men and 7 women in the Senate). Ironically, the vote — 189 to 91 for the bill with 5 absentions — split the Right and Center parties down the middle, while the Left gave massive support to an issue to which they had previously only paid lip service.

None of this would have happened, of course, if grassroots organizations had not fought so hard. The main organization was the Movement for Freedom of Abortion and Contraception (Mouvement pour la Liberte de l'Avortement et de la Contraception, MLAC), which was established in April, 1973. MLAC was a coalition of various Left groups, both within the women's movement and outside it.

Above: French women demonstrating for free abortion on demand, including abortion rights for minors and immigrants.

The rebellion of 1968 had given rise not only to the first women's groups, but also to groups of radical doctors and health workers dedicated to fighting within the medical establishment. MLAC was a mass movement of both sexes which included many of these Left health workers, whose strong class priorities and bold activist tactics included performing illegal abortions. Its most remarkable innovation was the establishment of group discussions before and after abortions, so that women who came for the procedure could discuss their problems and find solidarity as well. In 1974 part of MLAC decided to discontinue performing illegal abortions, which they saw as providing a stopgap for the state's failure, and decided instead to confront specific hospitals with demands for abortion, a tactic taken up again after passage of the Abortion Law. However, MLAC virtually went out of existence after the Law was passed.

Although abortion was legalized in 1975, the law had many restrictions. First, the *Loi Veil* actually only suspended for five years the infamous 1920 law which made abortion a crime; hence the present organizing for a permanent law which will completely remove abortion from the taint of criminality. Second, according to the new law abortions must be performed within ten weeks of conception. This requirement would be reasonable if it were possible for a woman to obtain an abortion rapidly. In practice, however, it is not possible, and not because of any laxity in making the request. In fact, 96 percent of abortion requests are made within the proper time limit. But there simply are not enough hospitals that practice abortions, and of those that do, very few use the vacuum aspiration method. The fact is that the government has not put any real pressure on the medical establishment to ensure enforcement of women's legal right to abortion. This failure is particularly striking and shocking in France, which, unlike the U.S., in principle functions as a "welfare state," with free medical services available to all. In France even contraceptives are now available free, like medicines.[1] Abortion, however, remains "apart," sometimes even physically, with an abortion wing tucked away at the far end of a gynecology department. Abortion has also proved highly profitable for private clinics. A recent study shows that of approximately 250,000 abortions a year, more than 100,000 are estimated to have been performed outside of public hospitals.

A woman who is not well informed and aggressive may waste much precious time looking for a hospital that will do an abortion, getting an appointment, etc. The law itself makes it even worse by making it mandatory for the woman to see a counsellor in order to discuss her decision and "think about it" — i.e., reconsider it — for one whole week. The effect is more time wasted, and what is as bad or worse, cases of "counselling" that amount to downright pressure against abortion. Counselors have questioned women about their religious beliefs, their sex lives, have shown them photos of fetuses, etc. In Brittany, a Catholic stronghold, a young couple was sent from one hospital to another, treatment which made sure that two weeks were wasted. The fact that few women make such a decision lightly is overlooked. In effect, everything possible is done to have someone other than the woman concerned make the decision, according to criteria which do not necessarily have anything to do with the woman's own needs and desires.

Finally, a famous section of the law known as the "clause de conscience" makes it possible for any doctor, midwife, or hospital worker to refuse to perform or assist in an abortion. Note that the doctor's conscience and convictions are automatically taken into account in a country where, for instance, the status of conscientious objector was not won until a few years ago. Some people's consciences do matter more than others. In practice, this clause has served as a

convenient pretext for doctors who do perform abortions to demand very high fees in private clinics. In public hospitals it frequently creates unhealthy power situations which interfere with the friendly and relaxed atmosphere needed for women having abortions.

The shortcomings of this law are obvious. We have to fight for the suppression of the two articles which make abortion a crime; the inclusion of abortion as a hospital service, free of charge and available in a supportive atmosphere; and the development of widespread dissemination of information on contraception and sexuality.

The main antiabortion organization is Let Them Live (*Laissez-les-Vivre*). It organized a counter-demonstration on October 6 but drew only 200 people. The influence of the Catholic Church on the subject of abortion is generally slight (and slighter still on the subject of contraception), except in a few regions where priests wield political influence. The arguments of the antiabortion lobby, which is dominated mainly by doctors and right-wing politicians, are moralistic, falsely scientific, and — anti-American! It is argued that Europe, and France in particular, must maintain a high birth rate to defend against American influence! (The French birth rate is still the highest in Europe, and there is no proof that abortion affects it.)

A proabortion rights campaign has been underway since May 1979 and is now being intensified with marches, leafletting, petitioning, etc.[2] The problem for the women's movement is its dependence on the parliamentary Left to amend the law. What is fundamentally different in France from the U.S. is that France has a strong Left, as entrenched and institutionalized as the Right, and the women's movement must constantly be aware of the danger of cooptation for electoralist purposes. It was for this reason that the march of October 5, 1979, was for women only. This restriction is most unusual in France, where the predominance of class-conscious movements usually leads to mixed attendance, even on women's issues. It was important for us that as many as 50,000 women came (one Frenchwoman out of 1000!). Quite a few men joined the march as individuals. The purpose and effect of the march was to assert the existence of the women's movement as a real force, with specific demands regarding abortion, and with its own impetus as well as proud slogans: "Our Bodies Belong to Us" — and to us only.

Danielle Stewart
Paris, November 1979

DANIELLE STEWART is a women's movement activist and university professor in Paris.

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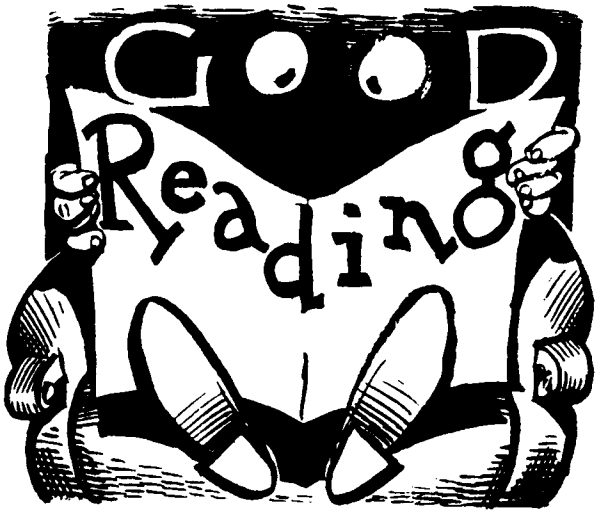

"Workers, Reproductive Hazards, and the Politics of Protection," *Feminist Studies,* Vol. 5, No. 2 (Summer, 1979). Women's Studies Program, Univ. of Maryland, College Park, MD, 20742. Special issue price $4. One year subscription price $10.

"Women Coal Miners," *Mountain Life and Work* (July/August, 1979). Council of the Southern Mountains, Drawer N, Clintwood, Va., 24228. Special issue price 50 cents. One year subscription $5.

The Summer, 1979 issue of *Feminist Studies* is devoted in large part to women workers' reproductive and health rights. It should be read by all leftists interested or active in workplace struggles. Rosalind Petchesky introduces a group of articles with a politically important essay. She explains how the various cutbacks in public funds for child care and abortions have grown along with the "right to life" movement. These cutbacks, together with other policies directed against women workers, like forced sterilization for women in dangerous jobs, are intended, not to keep women out of the labor force, but to keep them in low paid jobs where they will continue to be dependent on male wage earners.

Other articles by labor union health experts show an encouraging trend, however — a trend away from protective legislation for women and toward a more general attack on dangerous working conditions that affect the health and reproductive capacities of men as well as women. Michael Wright reports that his union, the Steelworkers, even favors the feminist demand for reproductive leaves with full pay for fathers and mothers. This union has not yet taken the next step of supporting paid paternity leaves, that would encourage a more equal distribution of child care.

The special *Feminist Studies* issue also includes a brief and grim history of old and new workplace health hazards, a useful history of protective laws and how they have been challenged by women plaintiffs, and a review of books on working women's health issues.

The July-August issue of *Mountain Life and Work*, a lively Appalachian publication, is devoted to women coal miners, who now number over 2,000, and the special hazards they face. The introduction seems overly optimistic about how much help women miners should expect from the union on health issues, but overall the articles show how important political changes can occur when women enter jobs and unions once restricted to men.

Both of these special issue publications indicate that the women's movement is having a real impact in the workplace. The struggle for women's health rights and reproductive freedom leads to feminist demands that will improve worklife for men and women.

Jim Green

Surrealism and Its Popular Accomplices, a special double issue of *Cultural Correspondence*, Fall 1979; 120 pp. large format, $2.50 from CC, c/o Dorrwar Bookstore, 224 Thayer St., Providence, RI 02906

The least predictable and in many ways the most exciting left magazine in the U.S. is *Cultural Correspondence.* Despite a slow start and a still-tiny circulation, CC during its last three years has published a number of outstanding issues, darting from one topic to another in the broad area of popular culture, always with a sense of humor. The current issue, guest-edited by Franklin Rosemont of

the small American surrealist group centered in Chicago, is well worth reading.

Surrealism in its heyday in France in the 1920s and '30s was always associated with political currents to the left of the official Communist parties. Though it is often pronounced dead as a cultural movement, present-day surrealism has a surprising vitality in its publications. The rationale for this *Cultural Correspondence* issue is stated in the introduction:

An appetite for the impossible, lust for adventure, readiness for the marvelous; an appeal to exaltation, acceptance of risk, scorn for pretense, hatred of sham; an expectation of the triumph of love, insistence on emotions experienced to the hilt, and a passion for life lived wondrously on the brink*; these qualities of the best in popular culture are no less qualities of surrealism.*

The issue explores every nook and cranny of American popular culture over the past century, looking for these values. It finds them in everything from Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward* to Gene Kelly's musical "Singin' in the Rain," with stop-offs that include Krazy Kat, The Shadow, Ernie Kovacs, Bugs Bunny, and dozens of others. From cover to cover it is a barrage of insights on the potentialities of popular culture. The content and the design are well-integrated, so that the attractive layout helps to convey some of the same excitement that the articles do.

The issue is weakest when it makes direct connections between the writers and artists it is discussing and surrealism as an actual cultural movement. The logic is often strained. What the issue *does* show, however, is that surrealism has provided the commentators represented here with a basis for appreciating popular culture, and a basis for seeing in it a great deal more than mindless entertainment.

Jim O'Brien

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LETTER

Dear Radical America,

First let me say that I liked Allen Hunter's and Linda Gordon's "Feminism, Leninism and the U.S.: A Comment" in RA (Sept.-Oct. 1979) very much. They helped me to understand some of what was going on in England in addition to generally pointing the way to politically good directions. So these are sort of further thoughts, second thoughts, additions, and amendments coming off of my own recent discussions with English feminists.

I don't know if it's altogether relevant to what you're trying to do, but I think there's a lot more to say about differences between the British and U.S. feminist movements. Our movement is "stronger," but after reflecting back on my trip I think a lot of our relative strength comes from (1) the existence of "bourgeois feminism" (which is almost absent in England, I don't know why) and (2) the greater cultural acceptability of at least bourgeois feminist ideas in the U.S. In a way, I almost think they have more of a "movement," while we have more cultural legitimacy — which makes us *think* we've gotten farther.

Very much connected to the differences is that English feminism seems — far more than American at this time — to be deeply engaged in a dialogue with the left. In the U.S. today, we are not engaged in the kind of dialogue Sheila Rowbotham takes up. (Of course, our relative disconnection from the left helps explain our greater cultural legitimacy here!) And I was very struck, in England, by a sense of engagement not only among socialist feminists, but radical feminists — who seemed to define their politics *as against* the mixed left, sort of like the early radical feminists who came out of SDS.

But here, for better or worse, feminists ("radical," socialist or whatever) ended their dialogue with Marxism-Leninism somewhere about three or four years ago — during and after the disastrous ML "raids" on socialist feminist women's unions and other organizations. True, academic Marxist feminists continue to work out new "syntheses" of Marxism and Feminism, but your average activist or grass roots feminists would probably be bored or bemused by a critique of Leninism. I don't think this is all to the good (more on that below), if only because most of us American socialist feminists never emerged from the more unpleasant encounters with MLism with the kind of clarity Sheila has. It just all became a dead issue. Everyone "knows" that Leninism is dreary, hierarchical, male-oriented, economistic, etc., etc., so why beat a dead horse ... and so forth.

And in a sense, Leninism is dead — even on the left. If we are to engage in a dialogue with the left which actually exists today I think we have to recognize that it is a very different left from 5 or 10 years ago. The overwhelming tendency — in the face of cutbacks, the rising right-wing ideological offensive, here and in England — is not to warm up Leninism, but the dullest and most economistic kind of social democracy: Join the Labour Party/Democratic Party to be "effective." Drop internationalism. Shed revolutionary "rhetoric." Concentrate on issues like the price of oil, unemployment, etc., because the "social" issues are too divisive (i.e., leave those issues — family, sexuality, abortion, etc. — to the right!) Contacts in Big Flame in England described the same depressing tendency. Leninism is just a little out of date as a target for feminist polemics.

In fact my own feeling — coming out of our American feminist experience — is that maybe it is time to take a slightly friendlier second look at Leninism. Not the "ML" party-lets, with their "professional" revolutionaries, democratic centralism and all that (which *is* incompatible with feminist process and vision...) But I think we could use an appreciation of the good oid tough-mindedness of Leninism — the insistence on actually figuring out how to make a revolution. You say in your comments "nor is there a feminist conception of how to take power." To put it mildly. I don't think there is usually even a conception that you might *need* a conception of how to take power. What lies between the twelve-woman CR group and the Amazonian utopia of the feminist visionaries is a vast analytical desert. It seems as if, in rejecting "male" ways of thinking, feminism threw out the idea of method, or *agency*.

For example, where is the body of feminist analysis that talks about the existence of an objective basis for sisterhood — for the collective consciousness of women as women — and whether this basis may be changing? And if we don't talk about that, then where are we expecting a feminist revolution to come from? And, of course, I am leaving out any need to figure out agency in a more mechanical sense — organizational forms, tactics, etc.

I think that we implicitly do have a feminist "strategy," and I think it is quite different from that of English feminists. Ours (I came to see by being 4,000 miles away) is almost classically anarchist — small cooperative enterprises (health clinics, coffee shops, services of various kinds) which will, hopefully, prefigure our goals and raise consciousness, leading to more cooperative enterprises, and so on. English feminism seems more "leninist" (if I'm not abusing the word past recognition) — national organizations, campaigns, etc. But whether I'm right or not in my characterizations of these implicit strategies, neither has been put to the test of even a serious sustained discussion. I'm for a little hard-headed collective thinking — in the *best* Leninist tradition.

Best,
Barbara Ehrenreich

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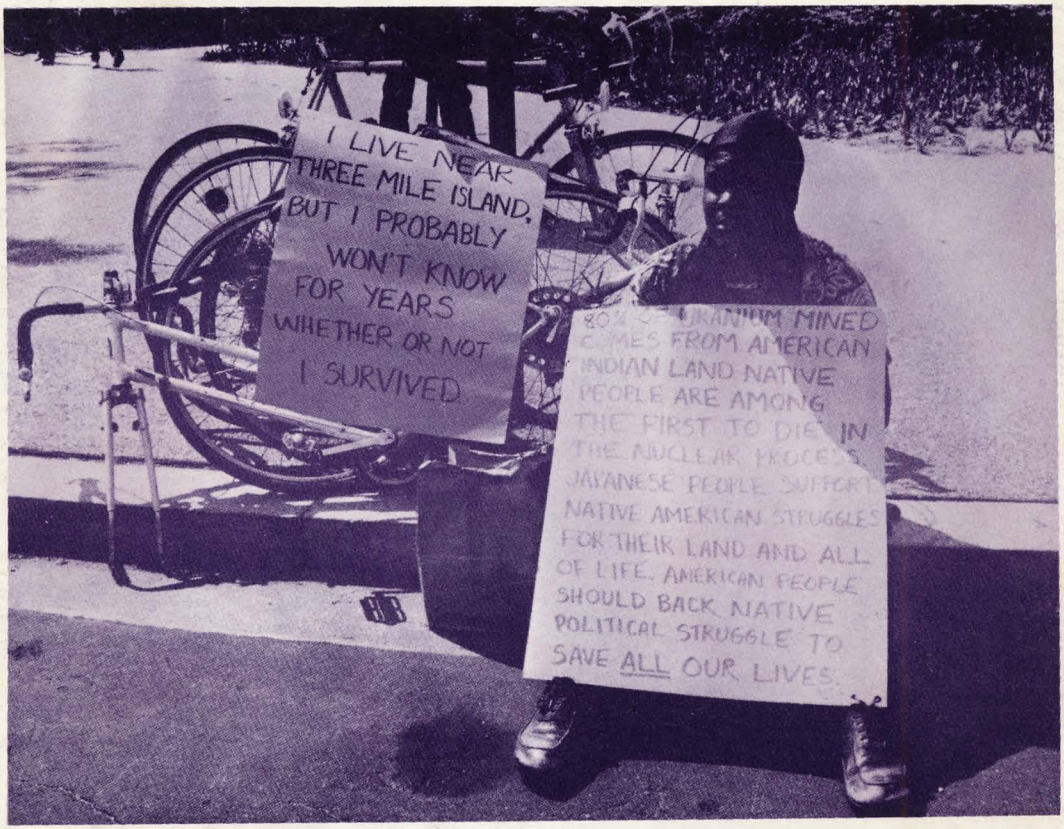
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